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4



Knight's & Magic

h-e-o 文庫

Knights & Magic

vol.4

by Amazake No Hisago

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4 ナイツ & マジック

Knight's & Magic

「それでは出発しましょう！」
エルが暴走するときには
キッドとアディも一緒に
暴れていることであらう。

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天酒之瓢
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とあ行きましょう
イカルガ……
戦いの始まりですよ！

カバーイラスト：黒崎

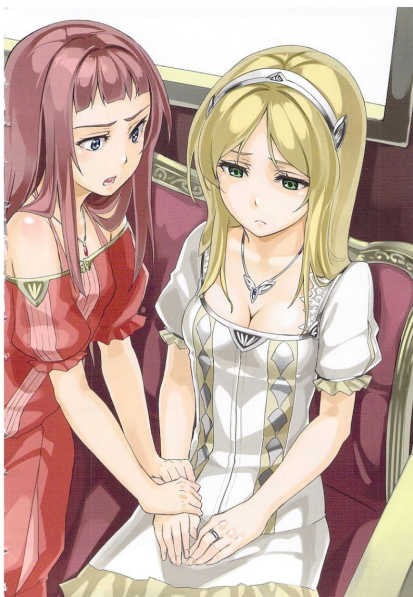


illustration 黒銀

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ナイツ&マジック⁴

Knight's & Magic

INTRODUCTION

まつり

戦いの始まり

お待たせしました!

ついに主人公・エル^{エル}の専用機「イカルガ」の登場です。

「彼らの上に影が覆い被さる。幻晶騎士が空を飛んでいるのだ」

「その機体は、狂気的なことに背からさらに

4本の腕を伸ばしていたのだから」

「その妙に人間臭い面置いの奥で眼球水晶をぐるりと巡らせた」

——「イカルガ」の登場シーンの描写を

抜粋してもワクワクしてきます。

エルならずとも、期待のメーターは

限界値を示していることでしょう。

「さあ、いきましょうイカルガ……^{まつり}戦いの始まりですよ!」

ナイツ&マジックは、これからが“**本番**”です!!

Prologue

The Zetterlund Continent— That was the name of the continent where Humans and Demon Beasts reside.

The tall Aubigne Mountain Range divided the continent into the eastern and western halves, with a large number of nations scattered around the land. They were known collectively as the ‘Western League of Nation’. In contrast, there was only one country in the east, the Kingdom facing the Bocuse Forest, the realm of the Demon Beasts. Taking on the role as the sword and shield of humanity— the Kingdom of Fremmevira.

At the foot of the Aubigne Mountain Range was a city which houses the largest school academy in Fremmevira Kingdom, the Laihiala Pilot Academy. And the base of the Silver Phoenix Knights, Fort Olvecius, was situated a short distance away from the city.

Even though it was called a fort, the function of the facility was not focused on battles, and the interior had mostly been taken up by ‘workshops’.

In the spacious hangar were the Silhouette Knights possessed by the Silver Phoenix Knights. The First Squad led by the Knight of pure white, the Second Squad commanded by the Crimson Knight and the Third Squad made up of the Centaur Knights. And at the head of the band of giant knights, was the Knight Commander machine that possessed top battle potential within the Kingdom— the ‘Armoured Samurai’ with two hearts and six arms.

The 10 meters tall human shaped weapons— Silhouette Knights, these knights of steel forged to battle Demon Beasts remained absolutely still like finely crafted statues, the scene of them in formation gave a sense of dignity. However, that didn't matter to the people rushing about hastily at their feet. They were the 'Silhouette Knights Craftsmen' responsible for the maintenance of the Silhouette Knights. They manned rugged mobile armours called 'Silhouette Gear' with bags of tools in hand as they busied themselves with work. A man was issuing instructions to the craftsmen with a loud voice, a dwarf youth. He was burly in built, and wore a huge beard on his authoritative face.

"Sigh, looks like we have many wilful brats among our Silhouette Knights."

He smiled wryly as he complained, turning his shoulders and making cracking noise. For some reasons, the Silver Phoenix Knights possessed the few unique machines within Fremmevira Kingdom. Everyone of them had powerful performance, but more effort would be required to perform maintenance. Hence, it was inevitable that the workload of the craftsmen would increase.

"Boss! The legs of the Tzendrinble are done! Its crystal tissue had been replaced with new ones too."

"Oh, good work. It seems this will be a long trip, we have to pay special attention to the legs of the horses."

After receiving the report of his subordinate who ran over, the dwarf youth— David Hepken nodded with a satisfied expression. He

had the title of ‘Chief craftsmen of the Silver Phoenix Knights’, but his subordinates he had known for a long time all prefer his nickname in school, ‘Boss’ to address him and he had gotten used to it. And it was true that his job was being the boss of this workshop.

“Boss— the maintenance and outfitting of the Silhouette Gears are all done.”

“Oh, good work Bart, the preparations are almost done then.”

A young dwarf came to report after that subordinate did. His name was Batson Termonen. He was different from others, a craftsman who was better in working on Silhouette Gear than Silhouette Knights.

The Boss then received several reports telling him that the maintenance was complete. Including Silhouette Knights, Silhouette Gears and the large wagons pulled by the Tzendrinble, the Silver Phoenix Knights had a wide variety of equipment. And with how large the group was, it took a lot of effort to get everything ready.

“We are finally ready. Looks like this will be a rowdy trip, so liven up!”

The Boss announced loudly with a smile, and the craftsmen all raised their arms in response. The Silhouette Knights standing tall silently behind them seemed to be gleaming with pride too.

At that moment, the Silver Phoenix Knights Commander Ernesti Echevarria wasn't in Fort Olvecius, but was together with his childhood friends in one of the homes in a corner of Laihiala Academy City.

"Alright, most of the things I need to bring along have been packed."

Eru came out of his room with his luggage in hand. Looking at him bringing a large luggage bag he couldn't quite wrap his arms around, Chid asked with his head tilted:

"Your stuff are all in the fort right? What exactly are you bringing?"

"Most of these are Silhouette Knight design notes, planning tools and textbooks."

"...Yeah, right. I think the trip this time won't be so relaxing, but never mind."

Even though they were setting off on a long journey, Eru still planned on bringing his usual tools on the road. That was just him, and made Chid dumbfounded.

"Wait, Eru. Did you forget anything? Did you remember to take

your Silhouette Knight along?”

At this moment, Eru’s mother, Celestina Echevarria, jogged after him. Mother and child were similar in appearance and in their eccentric behaviour, which almost made Chid, who was listening to them, fall down.

“Of course I did! It is the stage where I can strut my skills, the Knight Order are well prepared too. As everyone will be ferrying it together, we will be meeting up later.”

“I feel relieved... Eru, mother will be lonely, don’t get hurt and work hard, alright?”

Tina hugged Eru gently, reluctant to let go. Eru held her back and said with a firm nod:

“Okay! This trip will be a bit long, so take care of yourself too, mother. I will bring back plenty of souvenirs from there, so look forward to it.”

“Haha, it’s fine for you to bring back souvenirs... Working hard is important, but you must come back safely.”

His father, Mathias Echevarria, appeared from behind Tina with a wry smile. Although his son looked calm and unassuming, Eru could be very surprising at times, which made it hard for Mathias to be at ease. Even though Eru had the strength to make it through

any crisis, his parents couldn't help worrying. He patted Eru's head, and Tina turned to the twins who were with Eru and said:

"Ady and Chid, be careful too, please take care of Eru, okay?"

"Okay, Aunt Tina! Leave Eru to us, I will work hard as the Knight Commander's Aide!"

"I don't think Eru will be fine no matter what happens, but I will take care of him."

With that, Adeltrud Olter placed her hands on her hips and puffed her chest out, while Chid just shrugged. If Eru went out of control, the two of them would probably join him anyway— They didn't say that assumption though.

"Then we are off! First, to the capital to meet everyone from the Knight Order!"

After bidding farewell, Eru ran out energetically with his luggage in hand, and the twins followed. The parents watched the lively backs of the children until they disappeared from their sights.

C.E. 1281. It was almost summer, on a day with fine weather—

In the royal capital of the Fremmevira Kingdom Känkänen, and the royal castle Shreiber that laid within, a man was walking along the corridor with long strides, his huge build moving hastily. He was Second in the Line of succession to the throne of Fremmevira, Emrys Geijer Fremmevira. After reaching the end of the corridor, he pushed open the door hard and said in a loud voice:

“Dad!... No, Your Majesty. I need to go to the Kuscheperca Kingdom! You know the reason right!?”

Inside the door was the audience room of the King. In the depths of the vast hall where the throne was, King Riothamus Haarus Fremmevira sighed deeply in resignation, and waved away the surprised attendants around him.

“... Sigh, so you’ve heard. Hold on, foolish son. I can guess the reason, but let me ask anyway. Why do you want to visit the Kuscheperca Kingdom all of a sudden?”

The subject himself didn’t understand how his father felt about his son ignoring etiquettes, and shouted with his fist clenched:

“Do I even need to say it!? Don’t tell me you don’t know, Dad. Because the Kuscheperca Kingdom... The nation where Aunt resides in is under attack!!”

Seeing the Second Prince said that urgently with his fist clenched, Riothamus replied with a tone as if he had given up:

“Yes, I knew it would turn out like this, that’s why I suppressed the news. Where did you hear that from... But Emrys, we didn’t receive any request from that nation, what reason are you going to use to head into the battlefield?”

“Reason? I don’t need such things! Because Aunt is there, and we are her relatives! Of course we should help, isn’t that enough!?”

Riothamus nodded naturally and replied:

“I see, but I won’t send out our armies. Have you forgotten? We do have a vast number of Silhouette Knights, but they are here to protect the lands and people of the Kingdom, we can’t send them to the battlefield between other nations so easily.”

From the size of the territory alone, Fremmevira Kingdom was the top few amongst the human countries. And these nations were willing to be seen as being less prestigious than the border nation because of the countless Demon Beasts in their lands. That was the reason why they needed a huge army of Silhouette Knights, to keep the peace, and this shut the mouth of the aggressive Emrys. Even though he was reckless, Emrys also had a sense of righteousness, and won’t risk the safety of the citizens in order to rescue his aunt. That was why he said:

“Is that so? I get it... Then I will go to the Kuscheperca Kingdom and save aunt by myself!!”

He was the type who would put his thoughts into action once he had made up his mind. As Emrys turned to leave, Riothamus couldn't help holding his temple and said to the back of his son:

“What can you do by going alone?”

“... I don't know! But aunt took great care of me in the past, I can't just watch idly!”

Riothamus maintained his calm and said with squinted eyes:

“Well then, are you going to a nation at war with the name of ‘Emrys Geijer Fremmevira’? Don't you understand what that means?”

Emrys stopped as if he was struck by lightning.

“W-Well...”

“You are not that stupid, right? It's true that my sister is in that country, but more importantly, what will happen if my son went there? They might treat that as a declaration of war by the Kingdom of Fremmevira.”

“That's why I said...! That's right, the Kuscheperca Kingdom is on the west of the Aubigne Mountain Range. If that place is attacked, it means Fremmevira might be next! If we send reinforcement before

that...”

“That might be true, but are you going to give the enemy a proper reason to attack us? The actions of a King represents a Kingdom, and it is no exception for you who is in the line of succession. In conclusion, answer me Emrys, do you have the resolve to drag the nation and its people into war because of the choice you are going to make?”

Emrys fell silent, but even without words, how he felt was clear from his trembling body and fist that was clenched so tightly that blood was about to burst out.

“Your Majesty... Dad, do you mean you are going to abandon aunt...!?”

“That’s not possible, I wouldn’t do such a thing.”

The tone of the King completely flipped the direction the conversation was going. The dumbfounded Emrys couldn’t react for a moment.

“You can’t do anything even if you left by yourself. If you want to do something meaningful, you will need the appropriate power. I can’t commit our forces en masse, then I will just send warriors that can fight one to a hundred...”

As he listened to his father, Emrys thought of a Knight Band. In

Fremmevira Kingdom with plenty of Knight Orders, there were few who could fight one to a hundred. When he was about to said that name, news that ‘they’ had arrived reached the ears of the King.

“We have kept you waiting, Your Majesty. The three squads of the Silver Phoenix Knights are ready for the expedition, and are awaiting your orders.”

Ernesti appeared in the audience hall together with Chid and Ady, and knelt respectfully. Seeing Emrys, who didn’t stick to the rules, being struck speechless, Riothamus suppressed his laughter in one upping him.

“Not happy about this? Emrys, you know how strong they are. They are the strongest band of Knights that defeated the Behemoth and the Hive Queen, and saved our Kingdom from crisis numerous times.”

Emrys shook his head with a shocked expression and said:

“I know that very well... Hey, Dad, didn’t you say you won’t pick a fight so the Kingdom won’t get dragged into war?”

“Yes, that’s exactly it. So Emrys, you have to avoid using the name Fremmevira over there, and pretend you are not related to us. Don’t give anyone the excuse to attack our Kingdom.”

Emrys finally relaxed his shoulders in relief, such a crude method

even surprised Emrys who liked to solve problems with brute force.

“... Dad, aren't you just making excuses?”

“No, in such matters, the one who said it first wins. Emrys, if you persevere, there will always be a way.”

Riothamus cleared his throat, and continued after changing to a serious face:

“Our Kingdom is now progressing in unity, it would be troubling if fights broke out at our ‘rear’ during such a crucial moment. We need to make them a bit more peaceful, in other words, more balanced. Kuscheperca is a large nation in the west, we can't let it fall into chaos. I will leave my foolish son to you, Silver Phoenix Knights.”

“By your will, the Silver Phoenix Knight won't let you down.”

Emrys was hesitant about the right timing to speak, but probably felt it was too much of a hassle and said with a step forward:

“Right, that's fine! I feel at ease with you guys here. Let's go, Silver Phoenix Knights!!”

The King said to his departing back:

“Use your eyes and observe the war between nations well. We will be entering turbulent times soon. With such a situation, we can’t just fight the Demon Beasts blindly... And rescue Martina, I’m counting on you.”

Emrys turned his back a little, and nodded firmly.

All the cities of Fremmevira Kingdom, including the capital Känkänen, were protected by sturdy city walls without exceptions. The western gate of Känkänen— In front of the huge gate that a Silhouette Knight could walk through, the fully armoured Silver Phoenix Knights were gathered.

The core consists of the pride of the Silver Phoenix Knights, the Third Squad of Centaur Knights, Tzendrinble. A large wagon was attached to the back of the Tzendrinble, making it a powerful means of transport. As they were most suited to long distance marches, they received a careful overhaul this time. On the wagons were the Silhouette Knights in standby mode, the mass produced models that uses the most advanced technology, the Karrdator that made up the First and Second Squad.

And of course, they were also transporting other things like food, spare parts and maintenance tools for the Silhouette Knights too. With so much cargo, the group was rather large in scale.

“How impressive.”

“Putting it nicely, we are helping our allied nation, but we are actually going to war. Of course we are going to bring loads of things.”

The captain of the Third Squad, Helvi Oberg looked around her with an impressed expression and the one who answered her was the captain of the First Squad, Edgar C. Blanche. The Silver Phoenix Knights who possessed strong combat prowess and mobility had been tasked with missions to various locations, but those were only within the country. They had always moved with a light load on the premise that it would be a local deployment. It was the first time they went on an expedition with so many things in tow.

“One big factor is that we don’t know how the situation would be like over there. Alright you two, the Knight Commander is here, time to get ready to move.”

The captain of the Second Squad, Dietrich Cunitz showed up at this juncture. After saying that to the two of them, he went back to instructing his Squad members, and the members who had been waiting idly started preparing swiftly.

After passing through the gate, Emrys appeared with Eru. When he saw the fully loaded Silver Phoenix Knights, he remembered the rumours spreading amongst the people about the ‘Hive Beast Crisis’. If the Silver Phoenix Knights that suppressed that ‘most terrible attack in recent years’ was to go, they would definitely— As he was deep in thought, he reached the exceptionally large wagon at the fore of the Knights. The special wagon pulled by two Tzendrinble had an extravagant Silhouette Knight which was reflecting the golden sunlight.

“... Gordesleo, this time, you will be fighting for my aunt.”

Emrys was filled with emotions as he looked up at Gordesleo. Eru walked passed him and turned around, with his back to his Knight Order. Suddenly, all eyes present were on him.

“Your Highness, your orders please.”

“... Alright, Silver Phoenix Knights! Our mission is to save my aunt, keep the peace, and to send the retards who attempts to start a war flying with a punch!”

The briefing which was reckless in all sorts of ways made all the members standing properly slump their shoulders. Emrys wasn't concerned, and pumped his fist forward and said:

“The enemy aren't Demon Beasts! We might meet unimaginable difficulties, but I am confident that we can succeed with your powers and mine!”

“Well then— Everyone, liven up and let's join the fray!”

Eru had a joyous smile on his face, and made a violent conclusion. The members all shouted, followed by the sharp exhaust sound of the Silhouette Knights.

The Silver Phoenix Knights then set off towards the storm in the west, this was the first expedition to the west by the Kingdom of Fremmevira since its founding. Affecting both the east and the west sides of the continent, this year would herald the most drastic change in the history of the Zetterlund Continent.

Arc 7: Outbreak of War in the Western Realm

Chapter 29: The Beginning of the Grand Storm

The land was dyed black, a darkness that was cold and gleaming, showing the tough and thick metallic ground. And the ones that turned this land black were giant knights covered in dark steel armour— Silhouette Knights. This was an army of Silhouette that gave the illusion of extending into the other end of the horizon. They were gathered here in orderly formation.

This was one of the renowned great countries within the ‘Western League of Nation, Occident’— the capital of the Žaloudek Kingdom. The extravagant palace was situated in the middle of the capital, and the ground paved with stone slabs extended to its front. If one looked from the balcony jutting out from the front of the palace, he would be able to view the entire plaza carpeted by black.

On the balcony were several figures, two men and one woman. They had been watching the gathering of dark knights since just now, and finally, a young man walked forward. He was a youth about 25 years old, giving off the impression of great competence.

In concert with his steps, the low pulsing sound of the giant knights gradually quieted down. The intake valves of the Ether Reactors were suppressed, and the Crystal Tissues didn’t make any sound, the entire place fell into dead silence. Seeing the dark Silhouette

Knights motionless like statues, the young man nodded with satisfaction, and spoke calmly— His voice was broadcasted to every corner of the plaza through a certain device.

“‘Black Knights’, the pride of our nation that stands proudly in the west! We have finally reached this moment, and my heart is deeply moved.”

The first son of King Baldomero Bilt Žaloudek, Carlitos Emden Žaloudek paused, and surveyed the plaza slowly. His narrow eyes that gave the impression of being sharp were full of energy, and he wanted to convey his determination to everyone.

“Gentlemen, as you know, our Dear Leader, His Majesty Baldomero is bed ridden due to illness, and during the times of our early forebears, our lands were split due to despicable acts of treason. And now is the time to rebuilt our nation, and make our Kingdom great again! The regrets of my father pains me, his son, deeply! We have to inherit the will of His Majesty!”

Clank, clank, the Black Knights knocked their weapons on the ground, expressing their consent wordlessly. Carlitos was pleased with what he saw, and continued:

“In the past, these western lands are united under only one nation and one king. I am sure that all of you know, the name of that nation was ‘Father Aburdene’, and the league of nations in modern times... Our Kingdom of Žaloudek, Kingdom of Kuscheperca, The Allied Union of Rocard and the ‘Eleven Flags’. However, those are just splitted remnants of that giant nation.”

His tone became agitated, and his hands started gesturing wildly as he preached to the Black Knights:

“Father Aburdene expelled the Demon Beast with its power and ruled humanity, founding a utopian country! But the ambitions of fools burned this ideal to the ground, how can we not lament this loss!? We, the Kingdom of Žaloudek is the nation that inherited the bloodline of the fallen grand nation. We have the responsibility, and the duty to fulfill the grudges of our ancestors!”

In response to Carlitos raising his arm, the Black Knights started moving. They turned from statues to soldiers of dark steel, stomping their feet and banging their shields in support of their master. The uniform sound of clashing on the stone slabs reverberated throughout the plaza, and the ground rumoured loudly.

Carlitos raised his hand again, stopping the fervent movements of the Black Knights, and the army of steel reverted to silence again.

“The time has come.”

This was said calmly, but reached the heart of the listeners with deep passion. All the pilots controlling the Black Armour looked at their Holo Monitor with feverish eyes.

“For us to unite the great Empire that fragmented dishonourably—
That time has come!”

The knights burst out a roar, and the noise of the revving of the Ether Reactor shook the very air. No one could be certain what was being said, as the emotions started burning.

“We will take back our lands with the entire force of the Black Knights! Gentlemen, to war!”

Carlitos was the acting monarch in place of his father, and his words were equivalent to the will of King Baldomero Bilt Žaloudek. The pilots spurred by the prospect of invading their enemies maneuvered the strongest Silhouette Knights, shaking the ground with their every step.

C.E. 1281. With the coming of spring, the Žaloudek Kingdom declared war against the Allied Union of Rocard. One week after their declaration, Žaloudek Kingdom mobilized more than half of their forces— six knight orders with the Black Knights, the Green Bronze Claw Knights and the Bronze Fangs Knights in the lead. They formed two Battalion of about 600 Silhouette Knights, then marched to the borders.

And so began the total war that ravages the league of nations in the west— named by those in the future as ‘Western Grand Storm’ started.

“Allied Union of Rocard didn’t even last a month...”

In the capital of Kuscheperca Kingdom— Delvincourt, within the palace situated at its center, there was an exceptionally large audience hall. The King— Aukusti Vario Kuscheperca was seated on the delicately crafted throne as he said that with a bitter expression.

The reason his brows were furrowed deeply was because of a report from the western borders this morning. Its content was simple— the Allied Union of Rocard had fallen. The speed at which it had fallen was beyond the expectations of the Kuscheperca Kingdom which had been earnestly scouting out the situation since the declaration of war by Žaloudek.

“The Allied Union of Rocard might just be a coalition of minor states and far inferior to us in national power... But there should be proficient in defending through long years of experience.”

“According to reports, Žaloudek relied completely on brute force in battle, and broke through from the front without using any tactics.”

“They might be a great nation, but for Žaloudek to actually possess such power...”

King Aukusti listened to the discussion of his gathered subjects without a hint of emotion. The two largest countries amongst the Western League of Nations were Žaloudek Kingdom and Kuscheperca Kingdom. Their borders weren't connected, with several states of the Allied Union of Rocard standing between them. Caught in between the two giant nations, these countries so small that a gust of wind might unroot them only survived so long because they played the role of being a 'buffer zone'.

They did their best as small states to form a union, and made use of the military competition between the two nations to keep both sides in check, and maneuver between them deftly. However—

“This means that something happened in Žaloudek. Something boosted their power drastically, strong enough to spur their expansionist ambition.”

When they heard King Aukusti make his conclusion in a low voice, the subjects looked at each other. They couldn't imagine what caused this situation, and this wasn't the only thing they had to worry about. After the fall of the Allied Union of Rocard, there wasn't any news that Žaloudek had stopped their march— In fact, the reports showed that the opposite had happened.

“Their opponent might be a small nation, but they just finished a war with another country. And yet they want to attack us? No matter how strong that nation is, that is too foolhardy.”

Leaving Rocard aside, the Kuscheperca Kingdom was a great power and a thorn in Žaloudek's eyes. Even a great nation like Žaloudek didn't have the prowess to conquer both countries consecutively, which was why the Western League of Nations could keep their peace. In other words, something happened in Žaloudek Kingdom that was big enough to overturn this status quo.

The thought that ‘Kuscheperca Kingdom will be in grave danger if we don't solve this mystery’ flashed through King Aukusti's mind. He couldn't shake off this ominous feeling, but he couldn't show any weakness as the King.

“No matter what, since they are coming, we have to fight back.”

After hearing King Aukusti made his resolve, the gathered aristocrats all nodded nervously, with the faces of those with territories in the west showing the most bitter face. After all, the pride of the Žaloudek Kingdom, the Black Knights would be attacking their territory soon.

“Muster our forces in Silda Trider with haste. Let the invaders know that they should return to whence they came from and reevaluate their own power!”

Silda Trider was the defensive line in Kuscheperca Kingdom, known as the absolute defense line of Kuscheperca. They will be using these forts as their base to engage the Žaloudek army. After the King issued a clear order, the nobles carried out his will hurriedly.

That might be so, but Žaloudek should already know about Silda Trider, and couldn't break through no matter how large a force they committed. Are they confident of breaking through it...?

As he watched the aristocrats, King Aukusti's heart darkened. Unable to shake off the gloom of his heart, he cast his gaze to empty space as if he was looking at the walls of the grand fortress in the far west.

After decimating the Rocard states in a blink of an eye, the Žaloudek Kingdom built on their victory and march towards Kuscheperca Kingdom.

The area where western Kuscheperca Kingdom borders the Allied Union of Rocard was a vast plain known as Bastol. It had few barriers, a terrain that was easy to attack and difficult to defend. But the Kuscheperca Kingdom used its national power to construct tall and long walls here, and these walls were known as the First Shield of Silda Trider, Silda Uxia.

The sturdy walls weren't just several times taller than Silhouette Knights, there was also a fortress city behind it. With the combined defensive potential of the both of them, it was claimed that even an army of a thousand Silhouette Knights wouldn't be able to overcome it.

In the face of the world renowned great wall that was the physical manifestation of Kuscheperca Kingdom's national power, the Žaloudek army also spread its units out and built a large camp. Both sides deployed their entire forces in the very first battle. In the center of the plains dyed black by the Žaloudek formation, two figures surveyed the stone walls that covered their entire field of vision as they conversed:

“As expected of one of the famous Silda Trider, it looks like a difficult fortress to capture for us as well.”

“Hmmp, it's just a symbol of fear. Afraid of losing their lands, so they closed their gates like tortoises.”

One of them resembles the first prince of Žaloudek, but looked younger and had an arrogant aura about him.

His name was Cristóbal Hasslo Žaloudek. As his name suggest, he was the younger brother of Carlitos, the second prince of Žaloudek and the Commander-in-Chief of this expedition. The burly middle aged man besides him was Doroteo Mardones, who didn't belong to any Knight Order, and was Cristóbal's strategist.

Between the tense atmosphere of the two armies, the two of them were evaluating Silda Uxia casually as if they were chattering idly. They could see clearly from their position that the Kuscheperca Army was deployed in front of the fortress. After all, no matter how sturdy a fortress was, it would be broken if attacked relentlessly, so the Kuscheperca Army couldn't rely solely on a defensive battle.

As they watched the Kuscheperca Army that was ready to repel the Žaloudek invaders, Carlitos revealed a cruel smile, like a beast ready to pounce.

“So Kuscheperca adopted a defensive formation huh. Just as we expected, Your Highness.”

“It's pitiful that they can only rely on cheap tricks. Alright, I'm fine with both sides staring at each other... But it would be unpleasant if they think we are cowards. Let's start a fight.”

“Yes my liege.”

His order was enacted the next day. With the rising of the sun, the Žaloudeks marched forth. Accompanied by bugles and gongs, the Black Knights advanced in neat formation. Rank by rank, the majestic march of the Žaloudek army gave the Kuscheperca Army the illusion that a black wall was moving towards them.

“So that is the new machine models of Žaloudek huh... How huge...”

The pilots on the Kuscheperca military model ‘Resvant’ all held their breath because of the grand formation advancing on them. Their comment on the size of the enemy machines weren’t a metaphor, the latest Silhouette Knight model of the Žaloudek Army, the ‘Tyrant’ was at least a head taller than the Resvant. The Tyrant had fearsome armour and unbelievable power output, their entire body gave off a power that was on the verge of exploding.

Seeing that the Žaloudeks were attacking, the Kuschepercas prepared to engage. Silda Uxia launched the first long distance attack, the rain of stone launched by the catapults rained down on the Žaloudek armour. It wouldn’t be strange if such attacks could crush the Resvant along with their shields. But the Tyrant deflected the attack easily with their raised shields. Just how strong was the newest Žaloudek model? The Kuschepercas were stunned that the catapult attack didn’t have any effect.

Soon, the Žaloudek army moved into range of Silhouette Arms, and the magic projectiles from both sides changed the surrounding terrain. Shortly after, the Tyrants charged right into the Resvant formation. To avoid friendly fire, the catapult attack stopped. The Tyrants tossed their shields aside and engaged in melee attack. The sound of the two armies clashing broke out in the simple defensive structure built in front of the fortress.

“W-What’s with these guys... So tough! Weapons are useless against them!?”

“Damn it, my sword is bouncing off them...! Arrghh!?”

In no time, the battle turned one sidedly. The Tyrants completely showed their overwhelming power. The incredibly strong armour of the Tyrants blocked the swords of the Resvants effortlessly, and they destroyed the Resvants with one heavy swing of their warhammer. In the face of the onslaught of such tight ranks, the Kuscheperca couldn’t do anything except shuffling back.

The power of Žaloudek’s new model machine was greater than the Kuscheperca feared. Originally, the performance between the Žaloudek and Kuscheperca’s machine wasn’t too different, but there had obviously been a revolutionary technology breakthrough in Žaloudek recently. Even if they knew that, it was no consolation for Kuscheperca that was losing the battle badly.

“Damn it, the Žaloudek bastards are already climbing the walls...!”

“We can’t hold the line if this goes on... Fall back! Fall back and defend the fortress!!”

Moments later, only the foreboding black armours and crimson flames were left on the Bastol plains. Scattered all over the surroundings were the debris of Resvants. In contrast, the wreckages of the Black Knights were scant. The one sided massacre

left the Kuscheperca army no choice other than retreat. Fortunately, the Black Knight's heavy armour and massive power output were offset by their low mobility, so they couldn't catch up to the retreating Kuscheperca army, who were able to escape from the devastating hammer blow.

As they watched the enemy that covered the entire plains, even though the Kuschepercas were behind the famed infallible walls, the soldiers still fell into despair and uneasiness. The Žaloudek overwhelmingly powerful new model— in the face of that black tsunami, even the renowned impregnable Silda Uxia couldn't stand the assault forever. For the first time, they had doubts on how impregnable the fortress was, and dispatched a messenger with the battle report to the capital urgently, along with the hopes of all the soldiers in the fort.

The Žaloudek forces that advanced to the walls calmly prepared to lay siege. Compared to the panicking Kuscheperca army, they were so calm that it was terrifying, showing no signs of excitement about forcing their enemy to a desperate situation, or any rashness with their prey right before them. The only exception was the Commander-in Chief at the base behind them— Cristóbal, who was laughing heartily.

“Hahaha, how delightful! They must be sending out their horses in a panic right now!”

“That is only expected, Your Highness, what should we do next? Even the elite Black Knights couldn't do anything to such a high wall.”

“Why are you asking even though you know the answer. Just make

a show of attacking the walls relentlessly as planned. They will pool all their forces here sooner or later, without knowing that they are exposing their weak point.”

When he heard Cristóbal make an ominous prediction about the future of Kuscheperca, Doroteo could only answer with a wry smile.

The urgent message that arrived after exhausting several horses to death cast an air of emergency onto the capital of Kuscheperca once again.

“The strength of Žaloudek is incomparable to how they were in the past, we can’t fend them off even if we give everything we have... If this goes on, it will just be a matter of time before Silda Uxia falls...!”

The messenger who was absolutely dejected kept bowing his head onto the ground, and the leaders of Kuscheperca who were watching him all turned pale. King Aukusti was worried because his ominous feeling became reality, but he tried his best to keep a calm demeanor.

“Damn Žaloudeks... I was wondering where their confidence stemmed from, to think they are that powerful. Are their Silhouette Knights really that strong.”

“They are truly fearsome armoured monsters, we will be struck down if we took them on from the front... And the core of their strategy is to win by numbers, so there aren’t any flaws to exploit.”

The King sighed deeply in his heart, and leaned by on his throne weakly. For them, Silda Uxia was an impregnable existence. Even though the name Silda Trida meant that there were Silda Kaksla (Second Shield Fortress) and Silda Kormeda (Third Shield Fortress), their defensive capability weren’t as great as Silda Uxia. It would be foolhardy to engage the enemy in a straight fight too. After taking into account the existence of the fortress, the combat prowess between the two armies was obvious, and there were limited countermeasures that could be taken.

“Your Majesty, I propose alerting the western 15 counties, and gather our forces!”

When he heard the suggestion by a western aristocrat of Kuscheperca Kingdom, King Aukusti nodded grimly. Mustering the forces was a simple and practical method, and the Silhouette Knights of Kuscheperca, the Resvants, couldn’t match the enemy, and would need the advantage of numbers.

The Žaloudek’s Tyrants wield extraordinary prowess, and it would be impossible to break through the heavily armoured formation from the front. They had experienced this already. So they had to take them out one at a time by luring them to the fortress behind Silda Uxia. By thinning the enemy, there would definitely be weak points. It goes without saying that this plan would require great sacrifices. After discussing for a very long time, they couldn’t come up with a better alternative.

The meeting ended in a heavy mood, and King Aukusti retired to his chambers. He was known to be calm and gentle, but he couldn't keep his cool anymore. When he was alone, he took off mask of serenity and slammed his fist onto the table.

“This Kingdom finally became prosperous after such a long period of peace... And such national crisis strikes...”

Žaloudek Kingdom was shrouded in a strange air since long ago, but didn't make any major moves in the last decade. Now that he thought about it, they were probably preparing for this horrific invasion all this while. As a King, he failed to see through this and let down his guard in such time of peace, which was even more inexcusable.

“But I will settle this crisis myself! I mustn't leave this war to that ‘child’...!”

King Aukusti made up his mind and lifted his head. Suddenly, in this royal chamber devoid of anyone but him, a voice called out to him.

“Father...?”

King Aukusti turned in surprise, and before him was a beautiful blooming flower that was in the form of a human. She was King Aukusti's only daughter, first in the line of succession, 'Elenora Miranda Kuscheperca. She had a sorrowful expression as she

walked to her father's side.

“Father, I heard about it. The attacks of Žaloudek are strong, and has shakened the defences in the west...”

“Don't worry, Eleanora. Our Silda Trider is invincible, and the western lords are gathering their forces to counter attack, we will drive those unruly ruffians away soon.”

The twisted face of the monarch reverted to his gentle expression in an instant. Instead of the dignity of a king, he looked closer to a father soothing the uneasiness of his daughter. Eleonora will be 16 this year, and had lived in a peaceful environment since birth, and she was raised into a gentle and refined lady. Her personality was the furthest thing from violent, and as she was the only child of the King, Aukusti intentionally kept distressing news from her.

“...You are right, father. I can rest easy after hearing you say that.”

Eleanora who never doubted her father showed a gentle smile like sunshine in spring. After chatting a while more, the King watched the back of his departing daughter and muttered softly:

“That's right, there won't be a problem. I will take care of this war, and not let this fall on your shoulders.”

Unexpectedly, there were signs that the two armies separated by Silda Uxia would be engaging in a long war.

Žaloudek displayed overwhelming strength and devastated the Kuscheperca, but they didn't seem enthusiastic on breaking down the tough walls of Silda Uxia. With the Tyrant they were piloting, it was possible for them to destroy the wall. On top of that, there weren't any defences in front of the walls, leaving it literally unprotected. However, the Žaloudeks was moving sluggishly. The Kuscheperca army couldn't fathom this behaviour, but it was a good chance for Kuscheperca who were at a disadvantage. Reinforcement from all over the Kingdom was sent with urgency, and they were starting to gather around the fortress.

And so, the battle at the national borders dragged on for a month, and it had been two months since Žaloudek began its invasion. In this time, the attack of the Žaloudeks slowly but surely damaged Silda Uxia. There were many cracks in the walls that were the pride of Kuscheperca, and it wouldn't be surprising if it collapsed at any moment.

Behind it was the Kuscheperca army that had been gathered completely, and they were relieved in finishing to muster before the walls fell. The air was thick with the scent of an inevitable battle, with the combined forces on either side of the walls exceeding one thousand. A large scale battle that was rarely seen could break out at any moment.

Even though it happened on the other side of the wall, news of such a large enemy force gathering spread to the Žaloudeks naturally. This was the moment Cristóbal had been waiting for, and he issued

the order with a smile— the command to execute the secret mission that would decide the course of this battle.

“It is time, summon the Steel Wing Knights! Fufu, I will be moving out too, we will head straight into the heart of the enemy!”

“Yes Sire! I will do so at once!”

That’s right, Žaloudek who possessed such powerful forces and the Kuscheperca army who mustered an army to match— They were waiting for such a balance, and the moment when the Kuschepercas gathered in large numbers to overcome the strength difference between their individual machines.

And so, during a night with dim moonlight, Žaloudek’s ‘new weapon’ became one with the darkness and started their assault, without the Kuscheperca army noticing.

The center of the capital of Kuscheperca, Delvincourt, was far from the western borders. It had great national powers, and the long term stable political climate spurred the rapid growth culturally. And so, Delvincourt was one of the most prosperous cities in the west. However, the streets lined with elegant brick buildings lost its usual hustle and bustle, and the entire city was shrouded in uneasiness. News of the Žaloudek army threatening their national safety had reached the capital through various channels, and with the war going badly, all the pedestrians had grim faces.

On this day, one of the sentries on the outer wall of the city felt uneasiness by the unusually quiet night. Only the crackling of the torches used for lighting could be heard in the darkness. His attention was drawn by the sudden flow of the clouds and stopped. It wasn't easy to determine the flow of the clouds in the dark night, and he gave up a short moment later. Thinking this was probably his worries about the Žaloudek invasion playing tricks on his mind, he felt ashamed for being so easily spooked and returned to his patrols.

However, his instinct wasn't wrong.

The sound of canvas being blown by the wind came from somewhere, and the unnaturally loud noise of the wind seemed wrong to him. He was standing on a wall way above ground level and didn't feel any wind, so where did the sound of canvas come from?

He felt a chill down his back. Taking out a whistle from his pocket and holding it with his lips, he surveyed the surroundings tensely, determined to not miss any slight movements. It wasn't long before he witnessed an incredible sight.

Coincidentally, moonlight shone through the thick clouds as if they were parted by a giant hand. The pale moonlight fell onto the colossal figure that was advancing through the sky. The whistle fell from the wide open mouth of the sentry and the first thing he questioned was his eyes, then his sanity. The colossal figure parted the wind in its wake could only be described as a 'ship'. His common sense was sounding alarm bells. Ships should be a

transport vessel that floats on water, and definitely couldn't fly in the sky. On top of that, how could such a colossal object take flight?

It didn't appear black because of the backdrop of the moon, but because the ship itself was painted a dark shade that blended right into the night. Even the two 'sails' on either side of the ship were dyed completely black, that's why the sentry only noticed it at such close range.

As he stood in place stiffly, the floating black ship continued getting closer. In this windless night, only the vicinity of the ship had wind that was blowing in the direction it was traveling in. It was too close to hide its presence, and only the details of the external part of the ship could be made out. The sentry who was just one step from falling into panic made his last act of reason, a cry came out between his chattering teeth in place of the whistle.

"S-Someone...! T-There are intruders... No, it's a ship. A black ship is attacking from the sky!!"

During the time the sentry stumbled away, the flying ship that was still approaching was about to cross the walls. One ship. No, two ships, three ships— Behind the black ship spotted by the sentry, there were identical flying ships following behind. A total of ten vessels, a large fleet. As they watch the vessels appeared one after another, the people on the ground fell into panic. No one could believe it, and when they witness the sight for themselves, they would be frightened into silence. After that, when they could make out the banner of Žaloudek on the sails, they would regain their voices in the form of screams.

This was the ace of the Žaloudek Kingdom, Steel Wing Knights, a

special knight order made up of the first functional flying ships in this world, ‘Levitate Ships’.

The shape of the Levitate Ships was strange, as if a seaborne ship had been flipped upside down. Sails had been raised on either side of the ship, allowing it to advance with the wind. On the smooth top of the Levitate Ship— which was the bottom of seafaring ships — there was a part jutting up, which was the bridge which housed the command center of the ship. Inside the bridge, all sorts of mechanical parts were exposed, making it look messy.

There was a slightly elevated seat in the middle of the bridge. That was the seat of the captain, but someone unexpected was seated there right now— the Second Prince Cristóbal who should be at the western border of Silda Uxia was here.

“Kuscheperca wimps, scrambling around like pigs that had been pricked in the butt!”

“Anyone who didn’t know about the existence of Levitate Ships would be this surprised... What? Ugh... Your Highness, the spotters below sent a report saying the number of lights in the city had increased, they are probably preparing to engage us.”

“That is just futile resistance, our sword is already at their necks. Very well, let’s begin. All ships slow your advance!”

After receiving Cristóbal’s orders, the soldiers in the bridge opened the steel cover on the walls that revealed steel pipes, and shouted the orders into them. The orders would be transmitted to all parts

of the ship through the sound relay equipment.

“Attention figurehead! Reverse the direction of the Blow Engine. Retract the sail after slowing down, prepare to defend against ground attacks!”

“Figurehead acknowledge, reversing direction of Blow Engine.”

At the bow of the ship, a statue with the top half of a Silhouette Knight could be seen. It might be a little obnoxious to use it as a figurehead of a ship, but on closer inspection, the head of the knight was actually moving. The part known as the figurehead wasn't just a simple statue, but the top half of a Silhouette Knight was grafted there. The Silhouette Arms in its hands created whirlwinds around the Levitate Ship, changing the ship's course. This was the true reason why there was sound of the wind in this windless night.

The decelerating ship glide across the sky, passing over the walls easily and looming over the castle behind it easily.

As for the castle in the center of the capital, the guard garrison were panicking. That wasn't strange, since no one knew how to fight a ship flying in the sky. They could only follow the defence procedure of a night raid and increase the number bonfires, not even realizing that this would allow the enemy to see them and attack more clearly.

Inside the bridge of the Levitate Ship, Cristóbal was laughing his ass off at the foolishness of the enemy. He drew the sword on his waist as if he couldn't sit still anymore, and got up from the captain seat with a leap.

“Gentlemen of the Steel Wing Knights, pride of our nation! Tonight, we will take the capital of these fools!! Offer me your best!”

The soldiers started moving to carry out his command. The communication soldier relayed orders through the communication pipe, and the entire crew of the Levitate Ship acted in accordance.

“Orders! Orders! Begin air dropping Tyrants, start the landing preparation! Pilots standby inside the cockpit!”

“Starting airdrop procedures, injecting air into the Etheric Levitator!”

In the middle of the ship was a large machine, the heart of the Levitate Ship itself— the Etheric Levitator. Many soldiers surrounded it, staring at the gauges as they adjusted a series of levers. The Etheric Levitator was a powerful but delicate machine. If anything went wrong, the entire ship would crash into the ground. Hence, they need to be as swift and careful as possible. The craftsmen wiped away the sweat on their palms after accomplishing their goal.

“Report! All Tyrants are manned, airdrop preparations complete!”

“Dilution rate is 5.21, machine is stable, descending speed is good!”

Cristóbal listened to the report of the soldiers and deepened the smile on his face. And finally, he received the report he had been waiting for—

“Spotters report that the distance with the land is within 30! Within airdrop range, there aren’t any attacks from the ground yet!”

“Excellent, glory to the vanguard! Open the bottom hatch! Steel Wing Knights, attack!!”

The flat armoured bottom of the Levitate Ship opened, revealing several dark holes. Immediately after that, Silhouette Knights flew out along with the rattling sound of chains. No matter how sturdy a Silhouette Knight was, it would be decimated if it fell from such a height, so the altitude of the ship needed to be lowered, and crane lift would be needed to slow their descent midway.

After they were close enough to the ground, the Tyrants unbuckled the chains and landed with a cloud of dust. Because of the problem with weights, each vessel had the special roster of 2 fireteams (6 machines) of Silhouette Knights. It was a much smaller scale than the army at the west, 60 black towering knights still appeared in the capital of Kuscheperca. This was the first time in history that Levitate Ships used airborne tactics. In the face of the attack that defied common sense, the capital of Kuscheperca couldn’t defend itself.

A few hours after Žaloudek launched its sneak attack, one of the

prosperous cities of the west— Royal capital Delvincourt was ablaze, a hellish place where the citizens scrambled to hide. Black steel giants traversed the streets lined with brick buildings as the garrison knights of the capital city fell one after another. An adequate amount of defenders had been stationed around the city, but they didn't expect the enemy to attack directly from the air. And so, only one platoon (60 machines) rushed on scene immediately after realizing something was amiss.

“Damn it, what kind of heavy armour is this!? The Resvants are no match for them!!”

Just a swing of the warhammer by the Tyrants clad in black armour would send a Resvant flying along with its shield. After hearing about the situation at the borders, the royal guards were already prepared to face powerful foes. But the difference was beyond their imagination, and were on a completely different level from them. The vast gulf between the Tyrants and the Resvants was obvious to them.

Even so, the royal guards didn't give up. A group was about to surround and attack the Tyrants that were moving in small groups, attempting to use numbers to make up for firepower. But when they were tightening the encirclement, a suspicious black figure that was obviously different from Tyrants came running over the roofs of the buildings. The dark figure raised the sharp claw at the end of its arm, and swiped down the head of a Resvant. The size was obviously that of a Silhouette Knight, but its appearance was strange for a Silhouette Knight designed after the form of a human in armour. Its torso was really slender and its arms long and twisted.

“What's with these guys!? Are they from Žaloudek too!?”

The surprise attack of the black figure caused some confusion, but the Resvant team still attempted to counter. The black figure dodged the attacks easily as if it was mocking them, its movement surprisingly agile. Using the moment when the Resvant was unbalanced, the arm of the black figure ‘reach over’ violently, its claw piercing the abdomen of the Resvant just like that. The Resvant caught off guard didn’t even have the chance to evade and was silenced.

“Damn it, how dare you...!”

After seeing their comrade pierced by the arm of the alien, the other Resvants charged at the black figure in a fit of rage. It might be nimble, but with the burden on its arm, it won’t be able to utilize its speed. The Resvants couldn’t let this opportunity go.

But before they could do so, another black figure blocked their way. It was a Silhouette Knight with a similar slender body. The Resvant pilot who was blocked clicked his tongue, and used his momentum to slash at the new opponent. When the strike infused with wrath was about to hit the black figure, something slightly reflective flew out from the back of the figure, hitting the entire body of the Resvant with a hard blow. It destroyed the Resvant’s Crystal Tissue, stopping it like a puppet with its strings cut.

“Hmmp, what a let down.”

The diminished Resvant group lost their ability to keep up the encirclement, and the Tyrants started their counter attack. The Kuscheperca knights couldn’t do anything and lost their lives to the

heavy warhammers. The black figures left the routing Resvant unit behind and melted into the darkness once more.

“... Kuscheperca is finished... Work hard and earn more merits then.”

One of the Silhouette Knight appearing to be the commander gave its orders, and the other black figures nodded slightly and moved out. They hurdle buildings nimbly as they searched for their next prey. The next target of the black unit melting into the night was the core of the capital— The royal castle.

King Aukusti could feel slight tremors from his throne, which meant that war was upon him. He had received plenty of bad news all this while, and no one could grasp the entirety of the battle yet, confirming what was happening where. Or rather, the entire capital had become a battlefield.

The Kuscheperca army committed their forces before understanding the situation, and ended up in the foolish state of their army being dispersed. They couldn't do anything and were being slaughtered by the small elite Tyrant teams.

The worst outcome flashed across the mind of King Aukusti, and his face turned gloomy. At this moment, a soldier with a gloomier face arrived with news: “A bigger flying ship is heading this way.”

— It was certain that the enemy wanted to end this decisively.

“Is this the end...”

King Aukusti’s tired mutter was lost in the noise of his surroundings. He was secretly grateful that no one heard that and stood up.

“Gentlemen, looks like we will have to make the final decision.”

This was the capital, there was no retreat route for them. If the capital falls, the country was as good as destroyed. That was why the soldiers gave their all in resistance, but it was futile as the urban battle already decided the defeat of Kuscheperca, and the net was being tightened around them. They could use the castle as the last bastion of defence, but during the national emergency, all the defences were focused on the sturdy walls of the city, and the castle itself lack defensive capabilities. Since the enemy bypassed the walls and landed directly inside the capital, this was just a futile struggle. ‘Kuscheperca Kingdom will fall’— King Aukusti accepted this fact.

There was something he had to do. He walked to his daughter who looked uneasy, and surprised himself with how calm he said these words:

“The castle is surrounded. If this goes on, all the royalty would fall into their hands. Before that, you need to hurry and escape through the hidden passageway.”

“W-What about you, father!?”

“I... am the king of Kuscheperca, I have the obligation to fulfil my final duty.”

Tears welled in Eleanora’s eyes. She threw away the etiquettes she had been taught since birth, and jumped into his father’s arms.

“How... How can I do that, father!? Please run with me!! There is still time...”

“I can’t, Eleanora.”

King Aukusti pushed Eleanora away gently, looking straight into her eyes and rebuking her in a gentle voice:

“If the king is the first one to run, then I won’t be able to face the knights who are fighting with their life on the line. I will be mocked if I hand over the ‘King’s Mount’ over without a scratch.”

“But...”

Her words were stuck in her throat. King Aukusti hugged Eleanora who was crying uncontrollably, and shifted his gaze to the person standing beside her:

“Can I request something difficult from you, Martina?”

“Of course, I will protect Princess Eleanora with my life.”

The daughter of the former regent of Fremmeria, Martina Alt Kuscheperca, who married, Fernando Nevarez Kuscheperca, the younger brother of King Aukusti, nodded firmly. She then called out to the other girl who was present:

“Isadora, you two go first.”

“Yes mother. Come, we need to be quick Eleanora, there isn’t time...”

Martina’s daughter, Isadora Adalina Kuscheperca forcefully pulled away Eleanora who refused to leave. Even though Eleanora screamed and resisted, she was no match for the merciless Isadora. King Aukusti who watched them leave had a face of regret.

“My apologies, Martina, for troubling you.”

“Not at all, Your Majesty... I am not speaking up for Eleanora, but wouldn’t it be better for Your Majesty to leave with us? The King’s Mount is just a Silhouette Knight, compared to your safety...”

“That’s true, but you have seen the enemy right, Martina? A ship sailing in the sky had never been seen before. It is difficult to fight

an airborne enemy.”

King Aukusti looked out into the night through the windows, and before him was a black levitated ship illuminated by the blazing flames on the ground. The ship that was one size larger than the others was also painted black, but on a closer look, a large banner could be seen on it. There was no mistake, it was the colours of Žaloudek Kingdom.

“... If there aren't any royalty in the castle, the Žaloudeks will conduct a search with that vessel. It is not that easy to escape through the secret passage and hide from an aerial search, so the King has to be here. In order to draw their attention here, and to slow them down.”

“... Brother-in-law.”

Martina looked at the unusually calm Aukusti, and understood that he was ready to meet his end.

“And so, the heavy burden will fall on that child... Seems that I am neither a good king nor father.”

“That's not true...”

“Ever since my wife died, I doted that child very much. It will be fine under normal circumstances, but I am not sure if she could handle such a situation... Martina, can I leave her to you?”

“Alright, I promise you that child and I will repel the invaders one day.”

“I’m counting on you. Alright, we don’t have time to chatter... Please tell Fernando that I will be leaving the rest to him.”

Martina bit her lips for an instant, but she composed herself and curtsied, then chased after her daughter, leaving the man on his throne. King Aukusti closed his eyes for a long while, and when he realized that the ship was even closer, he showed a hearty smile.

“They might be accursed invaders, but their abilities aren’t bad. However, don’t look down on us...!”

The King issued his final decree—

“I will take the field! Prepare the King’s Mount!”

The sound of battle that had been raging on since the invasion of the Levitate Ship stopped gradually. Most of the Kuscheperca forces had been eliminated, their figures gone from the capital. Black armoured knights tightened their encirclement around the royal castle, even the Levitate Ships was closing in from above.

At this moment, the gates of the castle opened grandly, and

Silhouette Knights appeared in formation. The Resvants were adorned with decorative sashes, as if they were about to participate in a ceremony. The machines garrisoned in the castle wasn't much in terms of fighting prowess, and committing them to battle highlighted how desperate the Kuscheperca army was.

However, the Žaloudek army ignored the Resvants, focusing their attention to the extravagant Silhouette Knight in the center of the formation— The King's Mount of Kuscheperca Kingdom, Kartoga Ol Cauchard. Unfortunately, the moonlight was dim and aside from the reflection of the torches, it was hard to appreciate its beautiful designs. But it was enough for the Levitate Ship to target it.

Standing in the middle of the Resvants group which couldn't hide their unease, the Kartoga Ol Cauchard — King Aukusti who was piloting it looked up at the giant ship in the sky calmly.

“I heard King Baldomero had fallen sick in recent years, he can't be riding in that thing...”

The defenseless Kartoga Ol Cauchard walked forth alone. No one attacked the king, and a ship landed on the road in front of the castle. Unable to fathom how such a colossal ship could move so quietly, King Aukusti watched eagerly.

“Ara, seems like the other party accepted. It couldn't be helped...”

The machine with a yellowish brown base colour and shining brightly drew its sword. With the blade pointing skywards, it held the sword before it as if in prayer. It then thrust out the sword

straight ahead, then turned it and stabbed it into the ground. The Žaloudek army held their breath, this was an ancient ritual of challenging a formal duel. Since it was a duel requested by the King's Mount Kartoga Ol Cauchard, there was only one man present who was qualified to answer.

“I am Aukusti Vario Kuscheperca, King of Kuscheperca! The commander of the Žaloudeks on that flying ship, can you hear me!?”

A machine on the Levitate Ship stood up in response to King Aukusti, the only white armoured Silhouette Knight surrounded by a sea of black.

“I will answer you! I am the son of King Baldomero of Žaloudek, Cristóbal! The commander of this punitive force! King Aukusti, I will be your opponent in place of my father, the monarch!!”

“... Oh, to think King Baldomero would hand the frontlines to a child. But as the commander, you are good enough to be my opponent! Accept my challenge then!”

“That's what I intent to do, King Aukusti. Enough talk, let's converse with our swords!!”

The white machine leapt, and the moment it landed, the flag machine of the Žaloudek army, Alkelorix, raised its sword and shield towards Kartoga Ol Cauchard.

“Have at you!”

“En garde!”

The Resvants and Tyrants in the vicinity all stopped to watch the duel between these two. The strongest weapon in the world was the giant humanoid machine called Silhouette Knights. Probably because it mimicked the design of knights, it inherited many archaic and inefficient customs. ‘Duel between the command machines’— that was one such ancient custom that was especially inefficient. After all, the fate of an army, or even an entire nation would rest on the outcome of the fight.

Kartoga Ol Cauchard didn’t just look good, this personal machine of the King also had the best performance in the Kingdom. Even though King Aukusti’s skill was mediocre, it should be a match for a tyrant. However, the capability of Alkelorix was far better than Kartoga Ol Cauchard.

With a white base and gold frills, Alkelorix left a deep impression as it wielded its sword in the night— Kartoga Ol Cauchard needed to give everything to take this blow. In this one-sided situation, Kartoga Ol Cauchard could only defend.

There is no chance of winning this duel too!? Damn Žaloudek... And that flying ship, just what kind of secret technology have they uncovered!?

After a few exchanges, the movement of Kartoga Ol Cauchard had obviously slowed. Unable to withstand the fierce attack of

Alkelorix, its Crystal Tissue was starting to crumble. This could also be attributed to the gentle personality of Aukusti and the war-like nature of Cristóbal.

Kartoga Ol Cauchard that fought on bravely was finally defeated. His frustration grew and Aukusti's rushed swing was deflected. Alkelorix slashed at the opening, cutting deep into the abdomen of Kartoga Ol Cauchard, destroying its armour. The Crystal Tissue was severed and the core area of the machine was damaged. The intake valve broke down, destabilizing the mana supply. Unable to maintain its power output, Kartoga Ol Cauchard fell quickly, its body crashing into the ground amidst a dust cloud.

"... Ugh! W-Well done... Prince of Žaloudek, you've won... Come... finish this!"

King Aukusti couldn't stand after receiving the heavy blow, and said calmly as he shook his dizzy head. Even though his words would forfeit his life, a king can't lose shamefully.

"King Kuscheperca, I won this match, but you put up a good fight! Farewell!"

Cristóbal's tone was full of glee, but he still gave a proper reply. At this instant, Alkelorix deployed its Back Weapon it had not used yet and fired at Kartoga Ol Cauchard. Hit at such a close range, Kartoga Ol Cauchard erupted in a flame of explosion. Pieces of its shiny armour flew all over the place, breaking the machine into parts and reducing the cockpit into ashes.

As they watched the wreckage of the King's Mount blazing strongly, the soldiers of Kuscheperca cried out in sorrow with no regards to their appearance, then abandoned their machines and surrendered obediently. Because of their culture, the results of the duel between the commander machines were absolute no matter what the outcome may be. Although the Kuscheperca army didn't have a choice in the first place.

Right before the break of dawn, the capital city of Kuscheperca, Delvincourt fell. At the same time, it was the end of a great nation in the west. This shocking news first spread like wildfire in the Kuscheperca Kingdom, and then shook the entire Western League of Nations.

After that, the 'old' Kingdom of Kuscheperca fell into chaos. It was inevitable since they lost their King, but the worse thing was the death of the upper aristocrats who had gathered at the capital which was sacked, which impacted their territory greatly. The ones who should be taking over was a mess, and the situation became worse as days went by.

The Žaloudek army seized the opportunity and made an incredibly bold move. Even though they captured the old capital, they ended up isolated in the middle of enemy grounds. Not satisfied with just the subjugation of the capital, they sent out their ace— the Levitate Ships to attack the other parts of the country. The strategy was as dangerous as walking on a tightwire, but it still ended with the complete victory of Žaloudek.

Because of the new weapon that might 'attack from anywhere'—

the debut of the Levitate Ship, the nobles of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom had to change their tactic of focusing on the defence of the borders. Realizing the threat they were facing, the strategy they adopted was simple, which was to position their defences in all the important cities. But being too wary of aerial attacks meant they couldn't move their forces easily, and the nobles ended up trapping themselves.

The Kingdom fell into a mire after losing their king. In order to resist the Steel Wing Knights rampaging all over the nation, the nobles started withdrawing the forces they dispatched to Silda Trida. Even though the famished beasts was sharpening its claws right before them.

Seeing it from the big picture, this was a very retarded move— but the knights mustered at the fort actually obeyed this order. The citizens losing the spiritual pillar in the form of their king was a huge factor too. Since the backbone of the entire nation was flimsy, they had no choice but to narrow their defences to their home villages. In the end, they couldn't bear seeing their home town being attacked.

Even though they were at an impasse, a sizeable number of the defenders abandoned Silda Uxia without a fight. It wasn't long before the famous Silda Trida was broken through by the Žaloudek army.

Chapter 30: The Exiled Princess

News that the capital city of Kuscheperca, Delvincourt, had fallen, and the results right after the invasion were reported back to Žaloudek Kingdom. Ruling on behalf of King Baldomero who was bedridden— The First Prince Carlitos sat on the throne in the middle of the palace, unable to suppress his joy as he announced to the nobles present:

“According to the reports, after successfully subjugating Delvincourt, the forces around Kuscheperca are gradually dissolving. It won’t be long before we annex the entire Kuscheperca under our rule. After that, the Western League of Nations is as good as ours. The largest empire since the fall of Father Aburdene will be founded... The remaining minor states would be nothing more than pests.”

The gathered aristocrats expressed their compliments. Žaloudek and Kuscheperca were the two largest nation in the west. It’s as he said, the combined territory of these two countries (along with those of the Locard Allied Union) would mean the birth of a gigantic country spanning most of the western continent. After all the hardships experienced by Father Aburdene during its fall, it had finally seized the entire west once again— they were one step closer to realizing this ambition.

“As you gentlemen already know, we took action only after meticulous preparations. With this in mind, Cristóbal’s performance has been exemplary, his prowess makes him the strongest blade of Žaloudek.”

After hearing Carlitos’ joyous speech, the gathered nobles all expressed their agreement, and the hall was filled with cheerful laughter. At this moment, a young woman came before the throne, with the crowd parting to make way for her. Her sharp features resembled Carlitos a little, and their attire were similar too.

“Cristóbal did well. The subjugation is proceeding smoothly, but it should be about time that things become too much for that child. As agreed, I will head there to assist in the administration.”

The eldest daughter of King Žaloudek, Catalina Camilla Žaloudek said her piece. Her elder brother nodded with a wry smile.

“That’s right, Cristóbal is good at waging war, but has no talent in statesmanship. That’s why we need you, do lend him your kind assistance.”

The Second Prince Cristóbal is a battle maniac— This was a well established fact for everyone except himself. On the other hand, the First Princess Catalina wasn’t suited for war, but excels in administrative matters. In order to govern the vast new territories, her abilities were indispensable. With the encouragement from her brother, Catalina answered with a curtsy and retreated from the throne.

“Consequently, we can now invade Kuscheperca Kingdom without any worries. Are there any movements from the surrounding nations?”

A man that gave off the aura of a warrior stepped forth to answer Carlitos’ question. He was a Knight Commander who stayed behind to defend their domestic borders.

“Yes, Your Highness. Eleven Flags made some moves when we launched our invasion, but they had been exterminated by the Lead Bone Knights. Please don’t worry and attack as you wish.”

“Excellent work. Tell them to keep working hard as our defenders.”

The Knight Commander bowed deeply and stepped back. Carlitos confirmed all matters of importance, and sent his regards to those in charge. As the proceedings went on, it was finally the turn of a man who stood in a corner of the audience hall with a long face.

“...Lord Collazo! Your work is wonderful. The Levitate Ship you invented is the vessel that guided us to victory.”

“I am honoured for the chance to contribute to this nation. My talents are mediocre, but I will put in my utmost effort to serve.”

Even though he said that, the man was only superficially respectful, and lowered his head with a bored expression. Carlitos snorted softly, then reverted to his smiling face.

“Impressive. Please carry on your good work for our Black Knights.”

“... By your will. I will head for the workshop right this moment with haste, and do all I can for the Black Knights.”

The man bowed stiffly, then left the audience hall with haste. The contents aside, his attitude towards the acting monarch was deplorable. In fact, several nobles frowned at this sight.

“... That man. Isn't he rather impudent in the presence of His Highness?”

“Forget it, let him be. He might be crude in his manners, but he is valuable enough for me to overlook his rudeness. I need him to continue slaving hard for this country.”

Carlitos deepened the smile on his handsome face. The aristocrats around him looked as if they couldn't accept it, but they couldn't refute the acting King, so they just avoided the matter with ambiguous attitudes.

After leaving the audience hall, the man hastened his pace through the palace passageway and took off his outerwear roughly. He only exhaled in relief after loosening his tight collar. Formal wear was elegant, but was hard to breathe in. Under his outerwear was a medium built body that didn't look trained. From this, it was clear that the man wasn't a knight or a craftsman.

“Sigh, the acting king is scary. Never mind, it's thanks to his support that the Levitate Ship get to take to the sky.”

His name was Horacio Collazo. He had yet to celebrate his 30th birthday, but he had already climbed to the top of Žaloudek's national technological development, and held the important post of central research workshop director, a fast track career.

That was because he — or rather, his clan— and the theory they propositioned, which was acknowledged by the weapons they developed, propelling him to his current status. His clan discovered the theory of 'Pure Ether Usage'. The power that moves this world was Mana, and their focus was on the form Mana had before that, Ether, which yielded a wide variety of technologies. With the official funding by Žaloudek, they achieved a crucial result, the 'Ethereic Levitator'. This engine that was the representation of the 'Pure Ether Usage', and the first practical flying ship was born in human history.

"I am very grateful to His Highness, but this is getting overwhelming."

The debut of the Levitate Ship coincided with the completion of the new Silhouette Knights model, as if a powerful force was pulling the strings from behind.

The royalty of Žaloudek inherited the same ambition every generation, which was the revival of the legendary super country that dominated the entire west through force. The power of flight granted by a new theory, combined with combat strength that couldn't be matched by the old generation— the new model of Silhouette Knights fanned these flames of ambition.

"Things are getting hairy, the sharp gazes of the nobles is sure prickly."

Bringing the 'Pure Ether Usage' theory out from their home town was the wilful decision by Horacio alone. He had a dream, and to fulfill this dream, he needed a large amount of funds, the backing on the level of an entire country. That was the reason he went as far as betraying his clan in order to help the Žaloudek Kingdom. From the way things were, his plan was moving in the direction of being realized.

“Ara~ where might my Levitate Ship be soaring in now? I wish this useless war will end already, I want to fly freely in the sky soon.”

He looked up into the sky from the corridor, and a moment later, his plain face turned serious. He walked towards the Levitate Ship hangar with large strides again, preparing to return to the central research workshop that was as good as his home. As only a limited number of Levitate Ships were built so it wasn't widespread, he had the authority to use it as a personal means of transport as its inventor.

“Oh? That is...”

When Horacio reached the hangar, he happened to run into the princess who was about to board a Levitate Ship to Kuscheperca, Catalina. He then recalled the conversation he heard at the audience hall and an idea came to his mind. He hurried to Catalina.

“Pardon me, Your Highness Catalina, can I have some of your time?”

“You are... Horacio? What's the matter? Isn't your ship over there?”

Catalina was confused by Horacio who appeared suddenly, and pointed to the ship right beside hers.

“I know that Your Highness. I just wish to enquire about something with you.”

“... I need to hurry to Kuscheperca, please make this quick.”

Horacio offered his thanks, then gave a long speech:

“As I have said to Prince Carlitos, my job is to strengthen the power of the Black Knights and the Levitate Ship, but this isn't something that can be done by being holed up inside my workshop. I need information... And the easiest place to get those is from the battlefield where the Black Knights and Levitate Ships are being used frequently... Kuscheperca.”

Catalina's eyebrows twitched.

"In order to utilize my full potential and strengthen our nation, could you allow me to go with you to Kuscheperca?"

Horacio suppressed his urge to smile, he was bowing respectfully after all.

The forest region of old Kuscheperca Kingdom.

The sun illuminated the forest through the gaps between the tree leaves, and a group of riders and a carriage was advancing slowly. As the road wasn't paved, it would be too much for the carriage to pass through the uneven path, so they had to move slowly. On top of that, the mistresses of the carriage had to keep a low profile, which meant that they had to travel inconspicuously.

As for the reason, it was clear by observing the people on the carriage—a girl who had a tired looking face, and was expressionless due to being worn out. She was the princess of Kuscheperca, Eleonora. Sitting opposite her was Martina, the wife of King Kuscheperca's brother. While the one sitting beside Eleonora looking on anxiously was Isadora, Martina's daughter.

"Eleonora, be strong. I am vexed by what happened to His Majesty too... But you will need to support this Kingdom now, and expel those people out of the nation."

Even though Isadora was talking to her, Eleonora had no reaction, bobbing her head like a broken marionette. Martina frowned as she watched, and her expression grew stern. Eleonora had been like this during their entire escape. Her beauty that had been famed and likened to a blooming flower was now hollow and lackluster, similar to a lifeless doll to be toyed with. Isadora couldn't stand it and kept talking to her, but it wasn't effective.

That night, when Delvincourt was sacked by the Steel Wing Knights, they only escaped from the capital because of the King's

sacrifice. Their original plan was to head east, since that was the territory of Martina's husband— Prince Fernando. There was no better place to hide the princess who survived.

But the Steel Wing Knights stopped their plans. As the late King Aukusti predicted, the Zaloudek army was lax after defeating the King, but they discovered that the other royalties were missing shortly after. In the West, they had the practice of inheritance by bloodline, so leaving the scion of the King alive would be a troublesome matter. This was why when they extended their claws all over Kuscheperca, they also pursued for any trails of the escaped royalty.

Ever since they saw the ships flying in the sky, Martina's group decided to prioritize secrecy on this journey. After all, along them was a person who inherited a noble bloodline, and was the last hope of the Kingdom of Kuscheperca, so they couldn't take any risk. The escorting knights were also doubly cautious, careful to not let any news leak, limiting their contact with towns to the absolute minimum, choosing to travel through the forest far from any settlements. Such covert actions that drained resources and energy can only be maintained by force of will and hope. For a flower raised in a glasshouse, it wouldn't be surprising if she had already forsaken hope.

... If this goes on, even if we escape successfully, her heart won't be able to take it.

This escape had too many uncertainties, but the thing Martina was most concerned about was Eleonora's condition. After reaching the territory, Eleonora who inherited the direct bloodline would need to become the symbol of Kuscheperca Kingdom and rebuild the nation. But she lacked the conviction to lead the masses.

Martina peeked at her daughter. Despite the dire situation, Isadora's heart did not falter. Although she was concerned about Eleonora, Isadora did not show any signs of being depressed. Isadora had always been a tomboy who liked to mimic the knights, so this was a good quality to have under these circumstances. Martina couldn't help but think that it would be great if Eleonora had a tenth of

Isadora's strength.

The carriage ferrying the individuals with their own woes stopped suddenly. There was a tense air about the knights so obvious that even those within the carriage could feel it.

"!... What's going on!?"

Martina opened the window and asked the knights sharply. A knight mounted on the horse turned back and replied:

"Forgive me for not dismounting. Scouts reported sighting anomalies in front of us."

"Is it the enemy?"

"It is uncertain. But to be safe, we should make a detour..."

As the knight answered and was about to turn back, they heard a sharp whistling sound. An arrow pierced the head of the knight. Before the gasping Martina, the figure of the knight fell off the horse and out of her sight.

"Enemy attack! Enemy attack!"

"How is that possible? Aren't they further to the front!?"

"Anyway, let's hurry. We will become targets...Hya!?"

The sudden attack threw the escorting knights into confusion. In the meantime, soldiers with crossbows appeared from the trees one after another, decimating them mercilessly. The ambushing troops all wore armour with the same design, with the emblem of the Žaloudek army on them.

While the number of their knights was decreasing, the driver of the royal carriage set off immediately. He was also a trained knight, and was right in making this judgement. Unfortunately, he was still too late.

A sudden glaring orange light appeared on the carriages' route of advance, and was followed by an explosion. The intense flame and impact killed the horses instantly, and the carriage tumbled on the ground, bouncing a couple of times.

Immediately after, heavy footsteps could be heard from the front, the clinking of steel armour, sharp screech of the churning Crystal Tissue and the vague sound of air being sucked into the Ether Reactor were getting closer. Its true identity goes without saying, belonging to a black armoured giant knight— Silhouette Knights slowly appeared from the forest.

It wasn't just one, but six Silhouette Knights surrounded the carriage. The giant knights in black heavy armour were the new mass produced model from Žaloudek, the Tyrant, that ravaged the capital a few days ago. The Back Weapons protruding from their rear were ready to fire, one of it still had signs of firing a shot recently, emitting a faint glow.

Many soldiers appeared at the feet of the Tyrant, encircling the fallen carriage tightly. A man in standard issued armour split the group of soldiers wielding crossbows and staves, and appeared to be the captain. Seeing no further resistance, he announced in a loud voice with a smile:

“The people inside the carriage, come on out, it is futile to resist.”

But there was only silence. After being ambushed and taking a heavy blow from a magic shot, this was only natural. The captain snorted unhappily and warned again:

“We are not concerned about your lives, we will be fine with blowing you away like this.”

In concert with the open threat, a Tyrant aimed its Silhouette arms at the carriage. At this moment—

“Wait.”

After enough time past for a sigh, there was finally a response. The

man raised one eyebrow, and the door of the fallen carriage was kicked opened from the inside. As the Žaloudek soldiers raised their weapons in surprise, a figure climbed out of the carriage slowly. It was Martina. She leapt on top of the carriage, and surveyed the grunt soldiers from high ground.

“Hmmp, you even brought Silhouette Knights, making a mountain out of a molehill. And? You don’t even dare speak to an unarmed woman without holding a weapon in hand?”

She had a slender built for a woman and was trained, so she adopted the position of looking down at the crowd the moment she stood on top of the carriage. Her dress was slightly dirtied from the long journey, but her authoritative aura wasn’t affected at all, and even intimidated the rank and files. The face of the captain was also a bit stiff, but he remembered the current situation, and adopted a superficially respectful attitude.

“Isn’t this consort Martina? It is a great honour to meet you in person...”

“Such nerves...”

Martina frowned, ignored the captain and surveyed the surroundings. She was completely surrounded, and there were Silhouette Knights on standby a further distance away. On the other hand, all the knight escorts had been defeated, the situation was very dire. Even if she used herself as a decoy, she wasn’t certain if she could let Eleonora and Isadora escape. Unsure of her chances, she could only bite down on her lips.

“We have orders from His Highness Cristóbal to capture you, please don’t make any futile resistance... His Highness also said that if we can confirm your identity, it doesn’t matter if you are dead or alive. If you cooperate, I promise we won’t be too rough.”

The man’s tone implied that he had absolute control, which made Martina frown with displeasure. But no matter how rebellious she was, she wouldn’t resist in such a situation. After all, the giant knights that could turn human into minced meat instantly was intimidating her silently, any resistance was meaningless in their

presence.

“To think I would be a step behind... I miscalculated. No matter what, Silhouette Knights are hard to deal with.”

When he heard the vexed murmurs of Martina, the captain showed an irritating grin and said:

“Ah, I forgot to tell you. From the direction the carriage was heading, you probably planned to head into the eastern territory right? You can only seek refuge with the King’s brother. But regrettably, we just came from the eastern territory.”

Even though Martina had a tough front despite her vexed feeling, she showed signs of panicking for the first time.

“C-Could it be... you...!”

“You are smart enough to know the reason right? The pride of our nation, the Levitate Ship fleet! The Steel Wing Knights had already subjugated Fontanier of the eastern territory ahead of you!”

Martina felt the illusion of the ground beneath her feet falling away, and she could hear her pulse pounding beside her ears. Steeling herself with the worst prediction, she squeezed out the last ounce of her strength to glare at that man. He made a show of looking scared, then dealt the final blow.

“Oh right, I heard the King’s brother unfortunately died during the assault. And so, the only royalties left in this nation would be you all. There is nowhere to run.”

Martina fell on her knees weakly, her chest seized gradually to the depths of despair. The hope that she had clung into during the entire journey had been crushed mercilessly.

Ahhh... It’s all over. Brother-in-law and my husband are gone... who will save this Kingdom now...?

The soldiers had surrounded Martina who had given up. Nowhere

to run, no strength to fight. The troops captured Martina and the girls trembling inside the carriage.

The last hope of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom— Princess Eleonora's group fell into the hands of Žaloudek. This news was more than enough to eliminate the will of the old Kuscheperca nobles.

This happened in C.E. 1281, when the early summer wind was starting to blow. Žaloudek captured all surviving royalties of Kuscheperca and the Kingdom itself, completing the invasion.

The towering Aubigne Mountain Range was covered in clouds, marking the borders of the Western League of Nations. Between a valley, there was a road paved through the earth. This road was named the 'East-West Highway (Occident Road)' and leads to the east— one of the few ways leading into the Fremmevira Kingdom. Despite the powerful demon beasts running rampant in Fremmevira Kingdom, it also held fertile lands blessed by Aubigne. Merchants would scale the mountains and travel through here from time to time.

On this day, there was a caravan that came to the west through the East-West Highway. It's convoy of wagons meandered along the relatively even roads, each one of them carrying a vast amount of goods. They seemed to be very successful merchants.

The caravan moved smoothly, and at this moment, the leading wagon gave the signal to stop.

"What is the matter, Young Master?"

"... Something is amiss. The flag flying at the checkpoint is different."

A checkpoint could be seen ahead. It was built along the foot of Mount Aubigne, and was the leading into Kuscheperca. The banner flying above it was obviously not Kuscheperca. Those who knew

what happened could guess the colours of that nation immediately. But it was a shock to the caravan that travelled here from a long distance away.

“I see. That flag... How do you plan to proceed?”

“... Do I even need to say it, begin the ‘trade’ immediately.”

The person addressed as Young Master frowned, and the petite boy who queried him nodded. The boy then signaled the caravan behind him, and they resumed moving shortly.

“...Sigh, we really drew the worst lot.”

A sentry on top of the checkpoint complained as they faced the blue sky over Aubigne. The emblem of Žaloudek Kingdom was on their armour. The influence of that Kingdom had spread to the far east of Kuscheperca.

“Hey, since the checkpoint is built here, that means something is on the other side of the mountain right?”

National policies aside, for the soldiers, a place with sparse population and only forest, mountains and roads in view was terribly dull. Bored out of their mind, they stared blankly at the mountain range that stretched beyond the horizon as they chat.

“Let me think... Eh, there should be a remote country called Flamberge over there.”

“Huh~ the other side of Aubigne isn’t remote, that is the far end of the world.”

In this era, most people resides within the Western League of Nations. Aside from the people with power and merchants, the ‘world’ they knew was the west. With such a world view in mind, the Aubigne Mountains was as good as the far end of the world.

That was why the soldiers deployed to the far end of the world

couldn't work up the motivation for this task. Since there was a checkpoint and roads, that meant people would pass through. Their rational side told them that, but to be honest, they weren't interested in realms outside of their world.

“Why are we guarding this place... Hey, what is that...!?”

Another soldier who was in the midst of complaining suddenly saw something in the distance. Dust was being kicked up on the road passing through the forest, and the tremors of horse hooves could be felt through the ground. Any soldier would be familiar with this rhythmic sound, but it sounded ‘too heavy’. As if horses as large as Silhouette Knights were galloping, making these terrible noise.

“Is that horses...? No, that's too strange. Horses aren't that fast! They will be here very soon. Close the gate!! Just drop it!”

The shocked soldier shouted. The checkpoint's gate was a portcullis, which could be raised or lowered by chains. During emergencies, the ropes securing the gate could be cut to close the entrance immediately. In response to the sentry's cry, the other soldiers charged to the opening mechanism and used axes to sever the ropes tied to a counter weight. With the rattling of the sliding chains, the gate plunged onto the ground.

The moment the steel gate fell, the Silhouette Knights realized something was amiss and prepared for battle. Žaloudek's newest model of machine, the Tyrant, stood up and took a stance inside the checkpoint entrance. The next second, the cause of this unnatural situation burst onto the road and appeared before them.

“What the hell is that!? It's not horses... Men? Could those be... Silhouette Knights?”

The ‘thing’ that appeared under the sun had the top half of a human but the bottom half of a horse, an alien that could be more aptly described as half man half horse. The familiar grind of Crystal Tissues under its armour meant that it was a Silhouette Knight. But in the face of this extraordinary existence, the soldiers could only stand in place dumbfoundedly.

Approaching at a brisk pace, that ‘thing’— the Centaur Knight Tzendrinble slowed down when it saw that the gate of the checkpoint was closed. There were two of the strange Centaur Knights towing an enormous wagon. It made an ear screeching sound and sparks flew during its deceleration, kicking up a cloud of dust and leaving marks on the ground before grounding to a halt right at the entrance.

One casual voice came from somewhere, speaking to the soldiers who had frozen on the spot.

“Sorry to disturb~! We are the Silver Phoenix Merchants, we came from the other side of the mountains to trade. Could you let us pass?”

“Don’t bullshit! It’s impossible for merchants to possess such messed up horses!!”

When he heard the immediate retort, that voice sighed exasperatedly:

“You all don’t know? Demon Beasts run amok in the nation on the other side of the mountains. It is very dangerous, so we need such specialized horses!”

“It’s not a matter of it being specialized! This is too suspicious! All of you dismount from the machine and line up before me. We will check your luggage and origins thoroughly!”

As they spoke, the Tyrant unit raised their weapon and got ready for a battle. No matter where the Silver Phoenix Merchants came from, they didn’t think an armed group of such a scale would follow docilely.

“Oh... Can I ask you something? That isn’t a Kuscheperca flag right? Where do you come from?”

The soldiers didn’t notice that the voice lowered its pitch slightly, and told it the ‘obvious truth’:

“You claim to be merchants, but are behind in learning the news. Kuscheperca had already fallen! This place is run by us, the Żaloudek Kingdom now!”

“... I see, since it has fallen, I don’t have time to talk with you lot anymore.”

A sharp noise of air flow erupted from the giant wagon towed by the Centaur Knight, the sound of a Silhouette Knight’s heart—it’s Ether Reactor taking in Ether and churning it into mana. Immediately after that, the steel lines securing the cargo broke off, and the canvas on top was uncovered. Reflecting the golden ray of the sun was Gordesleo, the Silhouette Knight clad in golden armour and designed after the form of a lion. Emrys who was piloting it, glared murderously at the checkpoint on his Holo Monitor.

“If you don’t open the gate, I will have to resort to violence...!!”

Gordesleo jumped off the wagon, and started sprinting. It’s back weapon was deployed on Emrys’ command, alongside the Silhouette Arms that were concealed inside the machine’s pauldrons. Powerful mana flowed into the Emblem Graph, and the spell was activated.

“Outta my way!!”

The air tremored, this was the Overt spell cast by combining multiple Silhouette Arms, the certain kill arms of Gordesleo — ‘Blast Howling’. The huge expenditure of mana yielded the result of a powerful shockwave that went straight to the checkpoint. The sturdy steel gate that looked strong enough to withstand the body slam of a duel class demon beast was bent out of shape. After the joints cracked and fissures appeared on the walls, the gate was blasted into the air along with its hinge, flying straight at the Tyrant unit standing by behind it.

They couldn’t evade in time to the sudden change in circumstances, and the giant gate scored a direct hit on a tyrant. The heavy armour that withstood a direct hit from a catapult couldn’t take this blow. Its torso was bent inwards deeply, a critical hit from just one hit.

The machine collapsed and couldn't get up again.

"Im... Impossible! The gate that could withstand a body slam of a Silhouette Knight is destroyed! They possess Silhouette Arms with such ridiculous might!?"

"H-How dare they do this to us!"

Even the Black Knights were wavering after witnessing firepower beyond their expectation. The Centaur Knights used the chance and took action, the Tzendrinbles disconnected the link with the wagon and charged into the checkpoint that had lost its gate. The unique sound that was only possible with twin Ether Reactors was like the neigh of a horse, and their thundering hooves seemed to be threatening to break the very ground. After passing the gate, the Tzendrinbles readied their lances like cavalries, aiming them at the enemy.

"Y-You bastards...!"

It didn't slow down, plunging its lance into the body of the Black Knight, sending shattered armour and splinted Crystals into the air. However, the heavily damaged Tyrant didn't fall, and held tightly to the lance.

"What is this? Incredibly hard!! Hey, let go of my lance!"

An unexpectedly youthful protest came from the Centaur Knight. Although it had to drop to one knee after losing its balance, the Black Knight still held onto the lance stubbornly. At this moment, another Tzendrinble charged in and impaled the Black Knight again. The heavily damaged Black Knight couldn't withstand it. The lance pierced through its body, breaking its armour, Crystal Tissue and Inner Skeleton. The Tyrant fell to the ground heavily after the blow by the two lances.

"W-Why you! And you claim to be merchants! Don't think I will let you off so easily!!"

The Tyrant Unit regained their composure quickly and roared with

rage. Two fireteams (6 machines) were deployed here, and normally speaking, this would be enough to protect this far off place. But in a blink of an eye, they lost two of them.

The Tyrant eyed the ferocious Centaur Knights and Gordesleo which caused all this cautiously, and closed in on them carefully with shields raised and hammer ready. If they could put up a strong defence, the armour of the Tyrant could withstand any attacks, even if the enemy was as strong as monsters.

—At this moment, there was a terrible noise which could only be described as a ‘roar’. A feral roar to show its might to all living beings. With a tremor, the intense intake sound of the Behemoth’s heart erupted.

“... You all are too much, starting the fight without me. Let me and Ikaruga join you!”

The other ‘cargo’ left on the wagon at the entrance of the checkpoint started moving. A sudden burst of flame burned the canvas covering it and created a torrent of wind. A shadow passed through the center of the flames and into the air.

The soldiers witnessing this from the top of the checkpoint were certain that they had lost it. The figure blocked the sky above them. It didn’t look like a bird, was definitely not a beast, an existence that had the shape of a giant human— that of a Silhouette Knight. That’s right, a silhouette Knight was flying in the air. The checkpoint was about 30m tall, a height not even a Silhouette Knight could scale easily. But that Silhouette Knight could fly even higher.

“Impossible...”

The confused soldiers realized a fact quickly. If the shadow was over their head— That meant the landing spot was where they were. The group scattered in shock, and the next second, ‘that thing’ landed on the stone walls. With its back to the sun, its shadow reached the Tyrants beneath it. ‘That thing’ slowly stood up

before the frozen Žaloudek army who had yet to grasp the situation.

That Silhouette Knight was strange. About 10m tall, it wore armour of unique design and held two weirdly shaped sword in its arms. But the most prominent thing was on its back— That crazy machine had four more arms growing on its back. The Centaur Knights were very impactful, but the existence of this thing wasn't far off either. Standing before the intimidated Žaloudek soldiers was the personal machine of the Silver Phoenix Knight Knight Commander, Ernesti Echevarria— the six armed armoured samurai with the face of an oni, Ikaruga. It's Eye Crystal moved beneath the mask that resembled a human face.

“Let's go Ikaruga... The battle starts now!”

In response to Eru's joyous words, the main Reactor 'Behemoth's Heart' and secondary Reactor 'Queen's Coronet' revved loudly. The violent mana produced by the hearts of the colossal demon beast flowed into the Magius Jet Thrusters under the control of Eru, and the machine turned red as if it was wearing a crimson outer coat. Ikaruga kicked off the walls of the checkpoint and jumped into the air once again.

The body of Ikaruga turned black as its back was to the light, and the pilot of the Tyrant felt a chill as he locked eyes with its Crystal Eye.

“Mon... Monster...”

Using the inertia of its fall, Ikaruga slashed down at a Tyrant with the swords held in both arms. The blunt swords cut into the shoulders of the Tyrant through sheer brute force, shearing its arms off. The fearsome power output of Ikaruga allowed it to cut all the way down to the Tyrant's feet and into the ground, causing an explosion of dust. The Tyrant lost its balance from the impact and collapsed.

“One—”

Ikaruga stood up slowly before the maimed Tyrant. The sight of the

alien shaped enemy defeating the heavily armoured Black Knight terrorized the heart of the other knights.

“D-Damn it! What in the world are these things!! D-Don’t come here! All units fire!!”

The Black Knight screamed in fear as he tried to regain his composure. He couldn’t spare the effort to face this bizarre adversary. Abandoning close quarter combat which was their forte, they deployed their back weapons. But unfortunately, their opponent acted before they did.

A series of explosions rocked the ear drums of the Žaloudek soldiers, and Ikaruga charged forth with abnormal speed from the crimson flames bursting out from its back.

“Hyiii...!!”

The Tyrants fired off shots on reflex with a moan, but Ikaruga dodged them all with its propellor and got within sword range at the same time. It was mere coincidence that the Tyrant’s shield managed to block Ikaruga’s sword in time. After taking the powerful blow from the sword, the shield twisted out of shape immediately, and the Tyrant’s feet sunk into the ground. The arm shards of Crystal Tissue also flew out of the arm supporting the shield, it was a miracle that it didn’t fell on its knees right there and then. This was a power several times stronger than that of the Tyrant they knew, and a direct hit would definitely end badly. The Black Knight struggled to push the sword back, but only sunk in deeper. The pilot started doubting his eyes, the Tyrant was actually losing in a competition of strength? The alien enemy was overwhelmingly stronger than the Black Knights that ruled the battlefield in the west. He couldn’t fathom what kind of existence he was fighting, and could only endure the fear in silence.

While the Tyrant was suppressed, Ikaruga launched its attack mercilessly. The four arms on its back extended. Two of them held a halberd each, and attacked the Tyrant by drawing arcs through the air. Using its centrifugal force, it sliced off the arms of the Tyrant at the shoulder. While the Tyrant which lost its means to attack or

defend stood still on the spot, the sword attacked a second time. The Tyrant that received a terrible blow bent at the waist and fell onto the ground.

“Two—”

There were only two Tyrants left, and the pilots were in a complete state of panic. They belonged to the Green Bronze Claw Knights, and piloting the Tyrants were proof that they were elites. Despite the numerous battles they had been through, the enemy before them was beyond anything they had seen before. In the face of this extraordinary threat, they couldn't think of a way to achieve victory. Even so, they still fired off their back weapon haphazardly while the enemy was still some distance away, attacking with all they had. The shots fired at the armoured samurai, Centaur Knight and Gordesleo were random and spastic.

The shots soared through the sky like screams of terror, and was easily deflected by the halberd of Ikaruga, which then raised its sword against the Tyrant that was firing off shots single mindedly. Even though Ikaruga was obviously out of sword range.

“A shoot out huh! Great, I am happy to oblige.”

The sword wielded by Eru— Ikaruga wasn't normal. The moment a switch was pulled on the sword, the blade split into two. From within the thick blade, a mechanism that was obviously foreign to a sword appeared— Silver Plate, Steel Frame and Crystal Catalyst. A shocking amount of mana flowed into the sword, and the the Crystal Catalyst at the tip of the sword started to glow. This meant the sword also had the functionality of a Silhouette Arms— It was the giant version and latest model of Gun Staff, 'Sword Cannon'.

The Overedt Spell constructed from the Emblem Graft exploded with tremendous mana, and the glaring shot flew towards the Tyrant. The targeted Black Knight could only watch helplessly as the shot came at it from a place that defied common sense, and got hit before he could even dodge.

The Sword Cannon used the same spell as the large Silhouette Arms

equipped on the chariot, 'Falconet'. The firepower used to fight Battalion level demon beasts tore the Tyrant's heavy armour to shreds. After taking a few shots in succession, its figure finally disappeared in an explosion of flame.

"Three—"

The last Tyrant had no regards for its image as it turned and ran. This was a wise choice as the alien 'fierce god' was not an adversary he could take on. The two fire teams (6 machines) were decimated in no time, and he didn't have any allies left.

And of course, Ikaruga wouldn't let him go. It opened its armour, and hellish flame blasted out from the crevices. The overwhelming propulsion force of the Magius Jet Thrusters made Ikaruga disappear. No, the truth was, it gained explosive speed from a standstill, and drew near the Tyrant in one fell sweep. The Black Knight didn't even have time for last words as the Sword Cannon destroyed its back weapon and pierced into the spine. The Sword Cannon was then deployed while inside the machine. The entire Tyrant exploded from the shot fired inside its body, and turned into a pile of scrap metal the next instant.

"Four... Hmm? It's over? Not enough, Ikaruga hasn't had enough yet..."

In the wake of the explosion, Eru who was piloting Ikaruga threw a tantrum like a kid who didn't get his candy. Ikaruga shook its halberd in response.

"Can't be helped..."

After uttering the mutter from the bottom of his heart, Ikaruga folded the arms on its back, and withdrew them together with the halberds. It then turned the Sword Cannons around, and allowed the small sub arms secure it. After letting out an exceptionally loud roar, the noise that echoed to the surroundings finally stopped. After the battle ended, Ikaruga stopped the Behemoth's Heart, and switched to the normal power output— Queen's Coronet.

“... I just saw Eru came, and the battle was already over.”

“Of course, no matter how tough that black thing is, there is no way it could stand up to Eru and Ikaruga.”

At the checkpoint back then, the Tzendrinble noticed the deafening howl stopped, and could only look at each other dumbfoundedly.

The Tzendrinble from Third squad of the Silver Phoenix Knights walked down the East-West Highway one after another, while the Silhouette Gears captured the remnants of the Žaloudek forces quickly. They were scared out of their wits after witnessing the Tyrants being crushed, and surrendered without much resistance.

“Come look at this.”

At this moment, the Young Master— Emrys gathered the squad leaders of Silver Phoenix Knights and laid out the map he found in the checkpoint.

“Damn it, the situation is worse than I thought! This checkpoint is located to at the eastern border of Kuscheperca, while Žaloudek that launched the invasion is at the west of the Western League of Nations. The two of them are equally powerful, but Kuscheperca fell! I don’t understand, what happened to their King? And Aunt...!?”

His face twisted in pain as he spoke, and the faces of everyone turned gloomy. Everyone knew he was worried about the safety of his aunt, which was the reason he participated in this conflict. In other words, her well being was one of the directives of the Silver Phoenix Knights.

“There are too much we don’t know, so we should collect intel first.”

Eru cast his gaze to his back as he said that. Understanding what his intent was, several people nodded and slipped away quietly. The

spy group for this mission— the Blue Hawk Knights also dispatched people along. They were tasked with supporting the Silver Phoenix Knights, and collating intel was their forte.

“It’s true that we need to investigate! But the influence of the enemy has already reached here, it goes against my nature to just wait idly.”

After hearing Emrys said that painfully, Eru crossed his arms with a serious expression.

“Our plans has gone haywire. We were supposed to collate intel while pretending to be merchants, and then move in the dark.”

“I have been meaning to ask. You approached so boisterously with Tzendrinble, so were you serious about pretending to be merchants...?”

Dietrich’s retort was ignored very naturally.

“How about this? Before the collection of intel is complete, let’s ‘procure goods’ in the vicinity.”

“We are still going with the merchant setting huh... What goods are you talking about?”

When he heard the annoyed question from Dietrich, Eru turned towards him with an ominous smile.

“The Silhouette Knights of that Žaloudek something Kingdom of course.”

After deciding the course of action, the Silver Phoenix Knights used the captured checkpoint as a temporary base. The supply unit continued ferrying resources in, and people in Silhouette Gears bustled around their headquarters. Their procurements of goods were actually a destructive job.

“From this perspective, we are acting like terrorists. Instead of

merchants, how about becoming bandits?”

Dietrich's complaint was ignored. As the Silhouette Gears started setting up camp, the Silhouette Knights were also taking care of the wreckage of the Tyrants. These would be dissected and studied by knightsmiths to understand the prowess of the enemy.

“Is this...? In that case...”

Edgar who was cleaning up the scene in the white Silhouette Knight Artiladcumber stared the wreckage through his Holo Monitor and stopped his hands. He opened the cockpit and jumped onto the wreckage, studying something curiously.

“Hey, what is it? Edgar, we are still in the middle of work.”

“Helvi, look at this. The design of the enemy Knight... Doesn't it look familiar?”

Helvi tilted her head confusedly and exited her machine, then looked at the wreckage he was pointing at. She didn't need much time to reach the same conclusion as Edgar.

“Hmmp, I see, Back Weapons and Strand Crystal Tissue huh. Pri... Young Master said that the enemy is a nation that was on par with Kuscheperca not too long ago right? I understand why there is such a large gulf between them now.”

“Are you two talking about Silhouette Knights? You are discussing Silhouette Knights right? Let me join in!”

“Wah! E-Eru, where did you come from?”

Eru came to the side of Helvi who was crossing her arms out of nowhere. Where there are Silhouette Knights, there will be me—that's his motto.

“You came at the right time, Ernesti, can you tell me what is going on here?”

Eru followed the gaze of the unmoved Edgar, and showed an enlightened expression.

“The black Silhouette Knights they are using have the same technology as us. Our newest invention had been committed into live battle... It is probably as you imagined, their technology probably stemmed from the stolen Tellestarle.”

An image from several years ago flashed through Edgar’s mind—the Silhouette that defeated his Earlecumber and escaped. As if a string was connecting the past with the present.

“Then these guys... the people who threatened this nation is also our enemy! They destroyed my Earlecumber and stole Helvi’s Tellestarle...!!”

Edgar tightened his fists further. The Casadesus incident— Edgar had always bore a grudge for the event which led to the founding of the Silver Phoenix Knights. Someone gently held his fist that was clenched so tightly that his knuckles went white. It was Helvi.

“Calm down, I understand how you feel. I am angry and think this is unforgivable... But you are a captain right? How can you lose your cool so easily?”

Edgar groaned, exhaled, then relaxed his fists.

“That’s right... Sorry for making the person I promised remind me of that... I am still too inexperienced.”

“You’re welcome, or rather, I am happy that you are angry for my sake. Thank you.”

Helvi left a soft sensation on Edgar’s cheek momentarily, then returned to her Tzendrinble. Leaving behind the frozen Edgar.

“Ah— what the hell? I have the urge to vent by fighting the enemy, or I don’t think I can go on.”

On the other hand, Dietrich who continued working besides them

felt like abandoning his work. He tossed aside the debris in his hand and sighed to the heavens for all sorts of reason.

“There are plenty of enemies that we need to defeat, please don’t hold back and get as many as you want.

“Ohh, Eru is envious of that too right! Then I will also kiss—”

“Ady, Di-Senpai’s face is becoming really interesting, so please calm down.”

Eru soothed Ady who hugged him from behind out of nowhere. The gloomy Dietrich started to think that nothing mattered anymore, and shrugged resignedly in the end.

“... Forget about that for now, what do you think, Ernesti? That technology is ours, or rather, you thought most of them up. And after coming full circle, they are now our enemy.”

“Well, I am really excited.”

When heard an unexpectedly cheerful voice, Dietrich and Ady looked at each other with a weird face.

“Not a Silhouette Knight made by our Silver Phoenix Knights, or our nation Fremmevira. I am very curious about what technology they uncovered from the Tellestarle, and how they made the final product. Also...”

It wasn’t clear what Eru was thinking, but he had the smile of a predator before its prey.

“At the root of all this, those machines are made with our technology, so it isn’t wrong for all of them to belong to us. Furthermore, they are our enemy, so it will be fine to snatch them away and make them mine right? The more Silhouette Knights, the merrier!”

“No, that’s definitely twisted reasoning...”

Dietrich felt that Eru shouldn't say such brutish things with a smile — but realized he had the same smile on his face.

“Just the thought that they are the same gang as the ones who stole Tellestarle makes it impossible for me to sympathize with them. Edgar is full of drive, more so for the Young Master. I think we should follow the instruction of the Knight Commander and make them all sacrifices.”

Dietrich looked towards the foot of Aubigne Mountain, and the Kingdom of Kuscheperca that expanded from then on.

The flag of the Silver Pheonix knights was hoisted in the eastern borders. The storm had a new seed of fire, and at the same time, the ‘Silver Pheonix Merchants’ began the operation earnestly.

ティラントー

Tyrantor

Pilots / Members of Black Knights

spec

Height / 12.0m

Weight / 30.8t

Equipment /

Heavy Mace

Mace

Pike

Back Weapon (two)



explanation

Žaloudek Kingdom's newest version model of heavily armoured Silhouette Knights. In order to maximize the potential of Strand Crystal Tissue, which had excellent power but expended mana really quickly, the amount of Crystal Tissue was increased, giving it extremely high power output. Taking advantage of this feature, the armour was very thick as well. The machine was the personification of 'high powered and heavy armoured', but the massive weight lowered its agility drastically, and it also lacked endurance.

Chapter 31: The Imprisoned Princess

East of Kuscheperca. There was a strange rumour spreading among the Žaloudek that moved here, about a ‘demon faced death god riding on a gigantic alien horse hunting Silhouette Knights.

At first, most soldiers just laughed it off. It was impossible for such a terrible enemy to lurk in the nation that fell so easily. They were brave and excelled in battles, their absolute confidence in themselves made them let down their guard-- And then, they met it.

“We will be picked off if we split up! Keep together to strengthen our defences!!”

“W-We can’t. We can’t stop it! That death god...”

His words were drowned out by a burst of air, and the nightmarish existence appeared before the Tyrants resetting their formation in a panic. The alien charging with its head down was accompanied by the sound of hooves that shook the very ground. Its true identity was a humongous armoured wagon towed by two Tzendrinbles— in mode three ‘Chariot’. On the chariot was the six-armed death god with the mask of a demon, Ikaruga, completing the formation.

In the face of the rumoured terrifying existence, no, more terrifying than the rumours, the Black Knights couldn’t suppress their unease, but still challenged it bravely. The slow Black Knights couldn’t run away in the first place.

“I will be taking... your Silhouette Knights.”

Not a query or request, not a notification of something that had been decided. Using the chance while the two sides were still some distance apart, Ikaruga raised the four muzzles of the Sword Cannons on his back, and fired off crimson shots mercilessly, reducing one of the Black Knights to burning ash. The moment their formation was broken, Tzendrinble charged in again. The powerful blow backed by inertia sent the shield and giant body of the

armoured Black Knight flying. The last surviving Black Knight stepped forth valiantly, but was caught by the beast slaying sword protruding from the side of the chariot, and its body turned into the shape of a ' < '. The heavy blade fell innumerable shell beasts in the past, even the armour of the Black Knights couldn't withstand it.

When the death god chariot completed its charge of destruction, only the wreckages of the Black Knights were left in its wake. The chariot made a large turn, slowed down and then returned to the scene of carnage.

“Yes, we procured plenty of ‘merchandize’ today too. Let’s bring it back for business negotiation!”

“Eru seems so happy...”

“He must be having the time of his life, getting to pilot everywhere with Ikaruga to rob Silhouette Knights...”

A short moment later, the third squad arrived to pick up the remains of the Black Knights and left. Nothing was left behind, and the mysterious unit disappeared.

Reports of Black Knight patrol teams losing contact kept happening in the eastern territories. Rumours of the death god chariot didn't die down, and became more widespread, planting seeds of terror into the hearts of the frontline soldiers. Worst of all, this rumours confused the Žaloudek army, and it would be quite some time before they notice the existence of a fearsome enemy.

The wagon ferrying the goods advanced with the sound of thundering hooves. It sounded too heavy for normal horse drawn wagon as it was a colossal wagon drawn by Centaur Knights, Tzendrinble. It was surrounded by Karrdator which protected the cargo and convoy.

“To think the rumours were true--”

One of the nobles of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom, Baron Modesto Letonmaki stared at the row of ‘merchandize’ with his eyes wide

open. That was understandable, as the wreckage of Silhouette Knights was on the back of the wagon-- and it was the mass produced models of Žaloudek, Tyrants.

Not just Baron Letonmaki, the nobles fighting force all use the old mass produced model Resvants, and from the battles so far, they had seen numerous examples of them losing to the Tyrants of Žaloudek.

“What do you think about our merchandize? Isn’t this enough for you to make up your mind?”

Emrys presented the results of the Silver Phoenix Merchant’s procurement as he puffed out his chest proudly. The true identity of the demon-faced death god that massacred the Žaloudek was right before the Baron. But after the initial amazement and excitement, his face became sullen once again.

“... Yes, I can see your abilities clearly. These are excellent merchandize, just fighting on par with the Žaloudek we can’t stand up to is worthy of praise. However... That’s all there is to it. Assuming we work together and win battles regionally, it would just draw more enemy to my territory.”

Baron Letonmaki slouched his shoulders and said with a gloomy face.

“You all might be strong, but that doesn’t mean we can win. This will lead to a dead end for you too... Isn’t that why you are wandering around like this?”

Emrys' jovial mood in the beginning was like a lie, and he started sipping his tea impatiently. The Silver Phoenix Knights might have sparked frightening rumours after defeating numerous Black Knights, but they were reaching their limits too. There was no doubt that they were strong, but with just three squads (30 machines), there were overwhelmingly outnumbered. They might be great in attacking, but they were not suited for holding ground.

“... You serve the enemy because they are too strong?”

“A weak aristocrat like me has many concerns too. I can’t even safeguard myself, lest keep the citizens safe, how can we fight against them? On top of that, the royal bloodline is already lost... it will be impossible for the country to unite together now.”

Even though the Silver Phoenix Knights kept contacting the aristocrats of Kuscheperca like this, they failed to garner any good response. All of them had their reasons, but the main factor was the lack of a King that they could swear fealty to.

“Are aunt and the others already...?”

“I don’t know, but based on what those guys said, they had definitely fallen into enemy hands. Things aren’t looking good. Even if they are still alive...”

Emrys cut off the Baron’s words. He couldn’t accept that hypothesis calmly, and Baron Letonmaki apologized immediately for having misspoken. Emrys aunt was the spouse of the grandest noble in the eastern area-- Archduke Fernando. The result of the negotiation was obvious-- Baron Letonmaki agreed to support the Silver Phoenix Merchants, but was unwilling to commit any further. The other nobles were the same, willing to provide aid in the dark, but reluctant to participate in the war.

“... It’s no good, no matter how many minions we defeat, no one dares to make a move.”

Emrys growled like a beast. The nobles who understood the situation but was still hesitant, along with the lack of news on the royal family made him gloomier each day.

“Focusing on weakening the enemy had been working smoothly, it is about time to change our policies now. Also, we need to think of a ‘special way’ for the aristocrats to fight too, if we want to get their support...I will think more about this.”

Eru also groaned with his arms crossed, but his troubles were a little off topic.

“Isn’t there anything else we can do here...?”

Emrys who got this far on his will alone was starting to doubt too. At this moment, the Silver Phoenix Knights that seemed to be at a dead end received a news that could overturn the situation.

The old Kuscheperca Kingdom could be roughly divided into five zones-- The central zone where the capital was located, and the four ‘regional zones’ to the north, south, east and west.

The territory of the late brother of the King, Archduke Fernando Nevarez Kuscheperca, lies in the east. He died during the Žaloudek invasion, and his territory had been seized. Fernando was given peerage by his brother, King Aukusti, and bestowed a territory that befitted his title of Archduke, becoming one of his brother’s subjects. He retained the family name Kuscheperca as a sign that he hailed from the royal family, and his land was called ‘Fontaine’. It was also known by its more common name ‘Eastern territory’. Even though he was now the subject of the king, the Archduke was still tied to the royal family by blood, and would definitely be seen as an obstacle on the grand scale of things, and be eliminated.

The territory where the Archduke resides, Lacepede castle, had been taken by the Žaloudek army and was now used as their base. The most prominent part of Lacepede castle were the four tall towers built around it. These buildings were used by sentries in the past, and its function had gradually been lost after the era of peace. It was now retained simply as part of the castle’s decoration. However, it was being used not too long ago in a completely different manner.

There was a dejected girl with unfocused eyes in the room. Her name was Eleonora-- the princess who inherited the bloodline of Kuscheperca. This room used to imprison the princess had some furnishing, but was definitely not appropriate lodgings for a princess. She stared blankly at the iron bar windows and the extraordinarily sturdy door, then sighed for the umpteenth time. No

matter how she looked at it, this room would never change.

After falling into the hands of the Žaloudek army, she had been imprisoned in Lacepede castle. This room was located in the highest level of one of the towers, dozens of meters from the ground. The only mean of access was a long spiral staircase, and the tightest security had been arranged to prevent her escape. However, even if she could easily escape, whether she had the conviction was another matter.

Her spent her days filled with sighs and silence. After losing his father the king and forced onto an arduous escape, she was forcibly separated from her aunt Martina and cousin Isadora and locked up here. She was tormented by her helplessness each day, and was afraid of facing her future. It was no wonder that she became so gloomy.

But one day, a sudden change visited this quiet room.

A heavy knock came from the only door leading outside, the sudden sound surprised her. The maid waiting quietly in the room next door walked wordlessly to the door, and after conversing with the visitor shortly, the loud noise of the door unlocking could be heard. Even though it was some distance away, Eleonora could feel a strong presence entering the room. That person walked to the side of Eleonora who was trying her best to lower her head and avoid the gaze of others.

“How are you feeling? Former Princes of Kuscheperca.”

She trembled slightly, then looked up timidly. Before her was the Second Prince of Žaloudek, the commander-in-chief of the Žaloudek army-- Cristóbal.

“Hmmp. Seemed that you are living docily now.”

In the beginning, Eleonora panicked and cried hysterically when she was locked in here. But after a while, she became quiet and lifeless like she was now.

“I brought you good tidings today, rejoice. Your ‘use’ have been decided. In order to stabilize the territories of old Kuscheperca, your bloodline would prove useful.”

Cristóbal wasn’t concerned about her lack of reaction, and announced with the corner of his lips raised proudly:

“You shall be my bride.”

“H-How could it be... I refuse.”

Eleonora squeezed out words of resistance. Even though she lowered her head and was really soft, her intent on rejecting was obvious. Cristóbal continued smiling even though he realized this point.

“I know you wouldn’t agree so easily, but do you really think you have a choice?”

Cristóbal leaned forth and grabbed Eleonora’s wrist, even though she wanted to dodge on reflex. He then whispered in her ears:

“You will be useless if you refuse. I will just kill you, and use the other girl we captured.”

Eleonora opened her eyes wide stiffly, with the reflection of Cristóbal’s cruel smile reflected in them.

“Even though she is the daughter of the king’s brother, the bloodline of the royal still flow through her. She will prove extremely useful. After all, her mother was caught too, it wouldn’t be too hard to convince her.”

“Ah... Ahhh, how could you...”

Cristóbal let go of Eleonora, letting her collapse to the ground weakly. He then turned to leave, as if he was done with her.

“I have a merciful side to me too, so I will give you some time to answer. That might be so, but you better make up your mind soon. I

don't have much patience for half-hearted answers."

He left the room after saying these. A long while later, the dazed Eleonora finally came to her senses.

"... I'm sorry, I'm sorry everyone... I'm sorry, father...!!"

The sound of locks could be heard from the imprisoned princess' room, and Cristóbal descended the spiral staircase with his back towards her. He couldn't help sighing. Despite getting to wed a beautiful princess renowned in the west, he had an unhappy face.

"... What a gloomy woman, always weeping. She really doesn't suit my taste."

"Your Highness, you won't reject the marriage for such a reason right?"

When he heard the surprised voice of Doroteo who was waiting outside, Cristóbal twisted his face with displeasure.

"Hmmp, I will never waste the strategy my sister proposed for the domination of Kuscheperca. I am just venting, I hate that type of woman."

Doroteo was worried that his impatient and short tempered superior might be... But after hearing these words, he sighed in relief.

"Oh right, I heard that recently, the eastern territory is not peaceful, Doroteo."

Cristóbal changed the topic suddenly, hitting a weak spot in Doroteo. He hoped that his supervising officer wouldn't learn about them, but he still answered nonchalantly:

"Yes, those fellows didn't learn their lesson. I thought they would settle down sooner or later, but never imagined it would drag for so long. I have already prepared a punitive force to be dispatched."

“Oh? I thought the entire nation is full of gloomy cowards, to think there are people with guts still out there. Hey, I will take down that prey...”

“You mustn’t.”

Being interrupted midway spoiled Cristóbal’s improving mood.

“My lord, you wish to lead the campaign correct? You must not do that, Your Highness is the commander-in-chief of our Žaloudek army. Please leave such trivial matters to us, and focus on your duties as the commander.”

Cristóbal groaned, but suppressed it.

“Then hurry up and settle those trivial matters!!”

Doroteo hurried after Cristóbal who increased his pace. Even though he wasn’t good at handling his superior, Doroteo still acknowledged formally.

After Cristóbal left, Doroteo summoned his subordinates quickly. These men are under the direct command of the Second Prince, and elites that had braved through numerous battles with Doroteo.

“... That’s the situation. If we don’t solve this problem, His Highness might take an unnecessary interest in this again.”

They had served Cristóbal for years, together with Doroteo, and understood his temperament. They could imagine the conversation easily and all showed a wry smile.

“I still need to attend to His Highness. I will leave the rest to you, Gust.”

On hearing Doroteo’s command, a slender youth walked forth. He had many belts on his waist, with swords of various sizes hanging off them. The weirdly dressed youth knocked his knuckles together confidently and said:

"Oh, I have been for you to say that. Dad. Leave it to me, I will take of it perfectly!"

Doroteo's adopted son, Gustavo Mardones patted his chest and accepted the task. His foster father showed a complicated expression at his crude but reliable son, while his subordinates snickered quietly. The interactions between parent and child had become a common scene.

During this harmonious and turmoil atmosphere, the voice of a third party interjected suddenly:

"Can you count me in for that job?"

The sudden appearance of the figure and voice made everyone tense. When he saw the person came out of the shadows naturally, Doroteo narrowed his eyes and said in surprise:

"... Lady Hietakangas... Mistress of the Copper Fangs, what business do you have with us?"

Despite the suspicious attitude of the other party, Copper Fang Knights commander Kerhild Hietakangas wasn't fazed. She smiled and said to everyone:

"Don't be so guarded. Those who threaten Žaloudek are our enemies, I just want to do my part in defeating them."

"I have a feeling that it would become troubling if we took you on your offer. How do you want to help, specifically?"

"You know the forte of us Copper Fangs right? I will help you find those troubling deathgods."

Doroteo thought silently for a moment. After weighing Kerhild's motives and the problem of the enemy, and immediately conclude that the enemy was troubling because they were hard to track. And so, he accepted the proposal.

"Fufufu, I will send my subordinates to keep you updated. Please look forward to it."

After responding with a mischievous smile, Kerhild left. Gustavo watched her go and said in an unwilling tone to his father:

“Dad, is this really fine?”

"... She might be a vixen and is hard to deal with, but her ability is reliable. Don't worry, we just need to do our job well. Gustavo, set off the moment she notifies you."

Gustavo and the others saluted Doroteo as one. Shortly after, they left Lacepede castle on a Levitate Ship.

The Silver Phoenix Knights received that news when they were preparing to move out and attack as usual.

"... Are you certain that this information is reliable?"

"Yes. They are probably doing this to suppress the remnants of the Kuscheperca. They are spreading the information earnestly. To be safe, we have confirmed this information."

In reply to Eru's question, Nora Frykberg of the Blue Hawk Knights nodded with her usual poker face. When they entered the old Kuscheperca territory, they sent out the Blue Hawk Knights at the same time and achieved results.

"I understand, I will tell this to the Young Master... We are making yuge progress in one swoop."

Eru immediately gathered the members of the knights corp. His announcement will influence the direction they would take from now on.

"I have something to tell everyone. Before that, Young Master, do you want the good news first or the bad news?"

“Oh? The good news then.”

When he heard Emrys half-hearted reply, Eru said with a cheerful smile:

“The good news is — We found out where Lady Martina and the other surviving royal family are being held.”

“...!! Ernesti, are you for real!? Is that so... I see, so they are fine...!!”

Emrys turned suddenly, and raised his arms as if he was going to shout at the sky. Not just him, cheers broke out amongst the other members of the Knights.

“It’s our win after learning this! Silver Phoenix Knights, set off for the rescue right now!!”

“Please wait a moment. I am sorry for interrupting during such a joyous atmosphere, there is still the bad news. The Lady and the others are still alive... but there are some troublesome matters.”

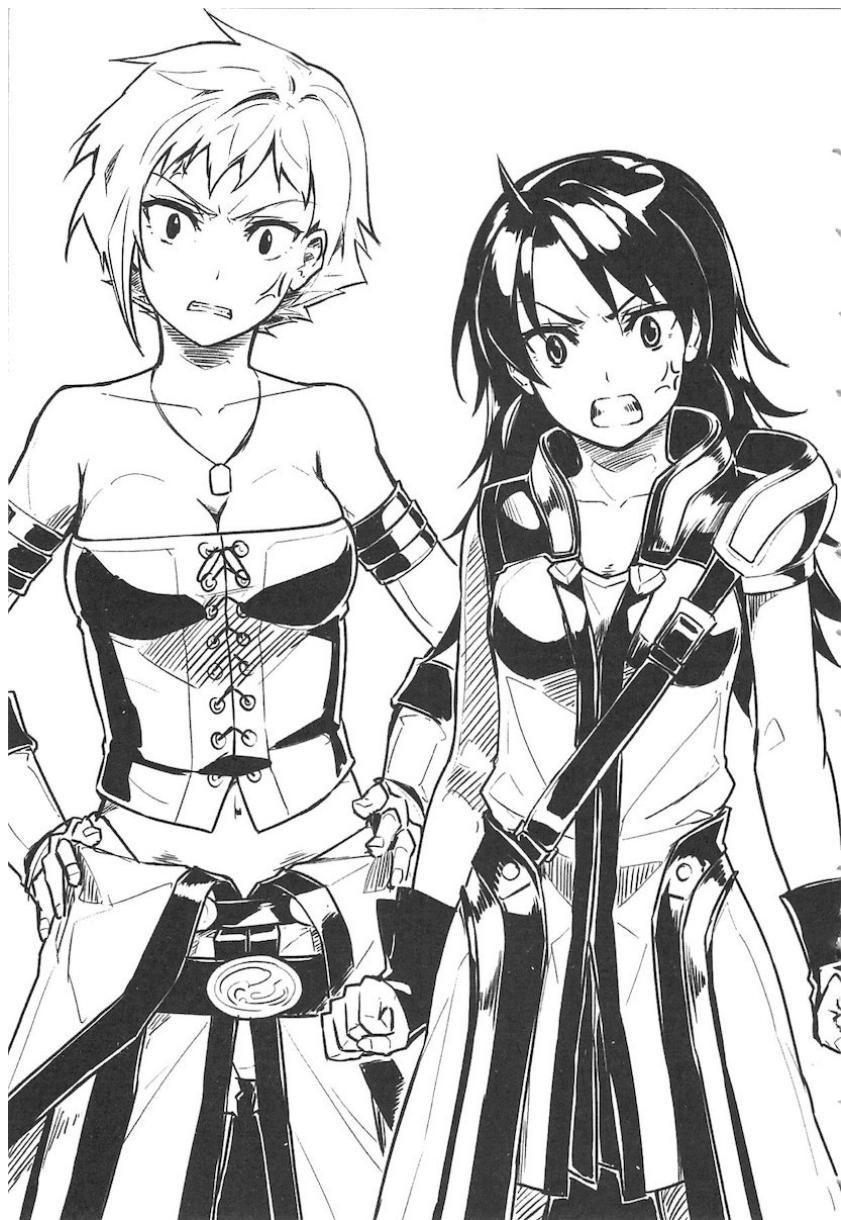
Eru restrained Emrys who was going further out of control than usual, and continued explaining the information he just received — All the royalty including the Princess were being imprisoned in Lacepede castle, and the prince of the Žaloudek army intended to take the princess as his wife.

At this point, everyone could predict how Emrys would react.

“I see, very well, let’s kill that retarded prince. Invading another country and seizing a princess, he is incorrigible!”

Emrys face looked like a demon whose veins were about to explode from rage. Not only was his aunt Martina important to him, he also empathized with Isadora and Princess Eleonora Kuscheperca who lost their home nation. When he learned that his kin had fallen into the hands of an enemy state, he was filled with wrath.

“That retarded prince is the worst! Forcing a girl with brute force is unforgivable!”



“That’s right! Let’s teach that insolent fool a lesson!”

The women of the Silver Phoenix Knights were also boiling with rage, especially Ady and Helvi. The three of them waved their arms around while cursing out at the prince, frightening the people

around them. They were about to charge off immediately and mount a rescue when Eru said lazily to their backs:

“Alright, don’t be so hasty. We shouldn’t mobilize the Knights for now.”

"What... Then how are you planning to save them!? Or do you want us to watch idly by!?"

Eru seemed unfazed by Emrys intimidating look, and answered nonchalantly:

"The Princess is being held in Fontaine, and the Žaloudek army had set up an eastern governance headquarters right there. In simple terms, that is one of the enemy’s stronghold.”

"... Tch, that’s right. Even the Silver Phoenix Knights can’t infiltrate that place so easily.”

After clearing up where the problem lies, Emrys cooled his head a little. The enemy forces at their headquarters couldn’t be compared to such rural areas. The Silver Phoenix Knights had been winning all their battles mainly because of the Tzendrinbles high mobility. Ikaruga and Gordesleo might be powerful, but there were limits to how much a single unit could do. If they want to attack a stronghold, the situation would be overwhelmingly disadvantageous for the Silver Phoenix Knights.

“Also, having the entire knights corp act would be too conspicuous. The worst scenario would be the enemy escaping with the princess, and we need to save multiple prisoners. If they use them as hostages, the rescue mission would become very complicated. Anyway, we have to rescue all the royals before the enemy finds out.”

Emrys’ furrowed into a knot again. Finding the place where the royals were imprisoned was heartening news, but it didn’t change the fact that their targets were still in enemy hands. Helvi and Ady also lowered their arms reluctantly.

“That’s why, the Knights corp will stay here and continue to fight, while we go get the royals back.”

There was only one person, Eru, who was smiling cheerfully.

"How are you going to do that? We have to get them back, but we can't do that without combat prowess."

“No, let’s think of it from the other perspective. Since we dealt quite a heavy blow to Žaloudek, they will definitely increase their forces to destroy our knight corps right? Let’s aim for this. The main units of a knight corps are Silhouette Knights, but we have another weapon... It is time for Silhouette Gears to shine.”

Gradually, Eru’s expression turned into that of a child who just thought of a prank, or one who was showing off his favourite toy.

"While the enemy is concentrating on the main forces of the Knights Corp, we will use the newest model of Silhouette Gears to infiltrate and rescue the princess and the others.....Batson! It is time for Shadowlad's to debut!"

“Oh, oh!? That is— make sense, if it is that...”

Batson who was named suddenly nodded in a panic, then turned to check behind. The Silhouette Gear over there wasn't a Motor Beat or a Motor Rad. The Blue Hawk Knights led by Nora standing beside them and nodded firmly.

Emrys who had been listening to Eru quietly couldn't help laughing out loudly:

“Fu, fufu, fuhaha, hahaha! Ernesti... You are really, fuhahaha, really good, I like this idea! Fufufu, especially the part of making them waste their time!”

After Emrys got fired up, the people around him started moving. In the heated atmosphere, Ady moved to Batson's side quietly and whispered:

“Bart, even though Eru said that, he just want to try out the new equipment right?”

"I think so too. It's Eru after all. Sigh, let's just keep this between us."

While Ady and Batson were whispering and nodding to each other, the preparations were proceeding smoothly. The Knight Commander Eru decided the plan and assigned tasks to the members.

"I will lead the rescue team. Chid and Ady will come with us too."

"Huh!? Us?"

Not just Ady, even Chid was panicking after being named.

"Yes. You two can pilot Motor Beat just like me, and are also the pilots of the Tzendrinbles. In order to keep the transport and infiltration forces to the minimum, you two would be indispensable members."

"I see... I understand, Eru! Let's rescue the princess together!" Ady raised her fist stronger than usual, and Chid shrugged as if it couldn't be helped. Emrys who was listening quietly grabbed Eru's head and said:

"Hey Ernesti, I want to join the rescue team, no matter what. What do you think I came all the way here to do?"

Eru escaped the claws grabbing his head and shaking it, then agreed with a sigh. Emrys might not be that compatible with the mission, but it was no use trying to dissuade him.

"That's the members of the rescue team. Next... I will be handing an important task to Edgar-sempai, Di-sempai, Helvi-sempai and all squads of the Silver Phoenix Knights."

The Squad Captains straightened their backs and gathered in front of the Knight Commander Eru. They had an inkling about where the conversation was heading, the main force's mission was probably to divert the enemy's attention. This was a dangerous move, but their expressions were determined. Eru took out a pile of paper out of

nowhere, showed it to them and said:

"In order to let the Kuschepercas fight too, I thought up a plan to remodel the Resvants. These are the designs."

"Huh!? When did you... That's impressive as always."

Although the Squad Captains were surprised, they still took the blueprints carefully. Eru puffed his chest proudly, then reverted to his serious expression and said:

"I hope the squads can bring this along to convince the nobles in the region. When we successfully carry out the rescue mission, it would mean the return of the country's monarch. What is left would be a war to reclaim the nation. At that time, not just us, they will need to fight too, and this is a way to give them some strength."

The Squad Captains suddenly felt the blueprints in their hands turned heavier. In a sense, these blueprints would decide the future of this lands.

"... Really now, you are making it sound so easy."

"But this is interesting. I am more suited for defense anyway, I will make sure the plans are handed to the aristocrats safely, and give the enemy a huge surprise."

Not just Edgar, all the members raised their arms in a loud cheer. And so, the rescue team and main forces stepped onto their own battlefield. The Silver Phoenix Knights that appeared calm on the surface but was as turbulent as a storm began their plans.

"Fufu, the princess rescue plan! That sounds good... Ahh, being rescued by Eru, I'm so jealous..."

"Stop talking nonsense. Come, we have an important mission on hand, go get ready."

Amongst the Knights getting ready to move, Chid grabbed the collar of the dreaming Ady and dragged her away.

The figure of dark vessels appeared over the serene skies of the eastern territories. Advancing leisurely by means of sail, the two ships — the Žaloudek army's secret weapon, the Levitate Ships were commanded by Gustavo's team from Fontaine.

"Ho, we are even sending out the valuable Levitate Ships, we are serious about this."

Gustavo sat on the captain's seat comfortably and said in a good mood. A man who seemed to be his subordinate replied:

"My humble opinion is that using Levitate Ships to deal with those rabbles is a little overkill."

As their opponents so far was the Kuscheperca army, the man's voice had a hint of contempt. Not just him, the entire Žaloudek army thought the same way. When he realized that, Gustavo showed a restless face, then quickly made a show of being relaxed and asked:

"I heard the death god or something enemy flees very fast! We will cut them off from the front with the Levitate Ships and defeat them! How about it? Isn't this perfect? We need to settle this fast, wasting more time will just bring shame to my foster father."

"Haha, that's true. Our true enemy is the patience of His Highness. That is more frightening than the Kuscheperca weakling."

The man left with a laugh and Gustavo watched him go.

Supporting his face casually, he put his elbow on the captain's seat and crossed his leg.

"... Sigh, you might mess up if you are that careless. With how the rumours of the death god are raging, they must be a difficult bunch to deal with. No matter what, I have to think of a way to deal with it."

Understanding where the source of the problem lies, Gustavo was confident and fearless. His unit headed east on the Levitate Ship.

Quite some time had passed since Ernesti led the Silhouette Gear units to rescue the princess.

The remaining First to Third Squad formed the main forces of the

Silver Phoenix Knights, and traveled around the eastern region of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom. The First and Second Squad formed the core of the two units, and the Tzendrinbles of Third Squad facilitate their movements. The objective of the main force was to deliver the 'Resvant strengthening plan' to the regional nobles and request for their aid. It would be more efficient to split up into smaller teams, but there were several reasons why they couldn't move in small groups.

The main reason was the repeated hunting of Silhouette Knights by their Knight Commander Ernesti, which infuriated the Žaloudek, prompting them to adopt countermeasures — prohibiting patrols at fireteams level (3 machines), and increasing the scale to a minimum of squad level (10 machines), or even multiple squads. For the Silver Phoenix Knights that didn't have their strongest ace, Ikaruga, fighting enemy of such a level was very dangerous.

"Seems like they have no intention of letting us finish the job easily."

"If they continue to be guarded against us, it will work to our benefit."

Because of the changes in the enemy's nation's movement, the main forces avoided battle. Thanks to the Žaloudek army concentrating their forces, the encounter rate between the two sides decreased instead. On the other hand, the existence of the main force had been exposed, and the alien herd of horses wasn't a mysterious rumour anymore, but a physical entity visible to the eyes.

"No matter what, our advantage still lies with the leg power of the Tzendrinble. Let's detour before we run into the enemy."

Behind the horses that were towing the Second Squad, Dietrich muttered hopefully, but it was in vain. The herd of Tzendrinbles towing wagon was very prominent. It was impossible to cover their tracks, so it was only a matter of time before they were found.

"..... Evasion report, found the horse herd. Releasing the hawks to continue the hunt..."

Dark shadows of giants hid in the forest along the road. Their stature might be imposing, but they didn't make a sound, and their presence was as faint as phantoms. The Centaur Knights galloping along the path didn't detect their presence at all. Shortly later, the dark giant moved stealthily, and several soldiers rode away on fast horses.

"... After verifying the reports, they are really there. The Vixen is really efficient."

On the bridge of the Levitate Ship, Gustavo groaned as he stroked his chin. In his line of sight ahead was a group of alien galloping along the forest path.

"So that is the rumoured 'death god knights'... No wonder it is so hard to locate them, what are those horse like things? Well, no matter who the opponent is, they will fall under my sword."

With the strange group of horses galloping in front of him, even Gustavo who was renowned for his bravery was surprised by this. Despite that, he composed himself and started issuing orders to his panicking subordinates. His courage was really phenomenal.

When the airborne Gustavo discovered the Second Squad of the Silver Phoenix Knights on the ground, the Second Squad also noticed the approaching Levitate Ship.

"What is that? Am I dreaming? A ship... is flying in the sky and chasing us!"

"How should I say this... To think that aside from our Knight Commander, there are other people who can make such things that defy common sense. The west really is a large place."

"Captain Di, that's not the part you should be surprised about! What should we do now!"

The Second Squad had quite a shock when they saw the Levitate

Ships, it was the first aerial unit in the world after all. Speaking of things that could take to the sky, the most they could think of was demon beasts. It was no surprise that the existence of the Levitate Ships would make them lose their wits. The Žaloudek army had always treated the Levitate Ships as a practical fighting force, but had never sent to the eastern borders. This was a dire situation for the Silver Phoenix Knights.

“Really now, they look just like normal ships. Hmm, those are... sails? On the sails are the flags of the Žaloudek Kingdom, so they are the enemy who is chasing us from the air... They seemed to be faster than us, we will have to fight.”

As expected of the Silver Phoenix Knights, they recomposed themselves in no time after sighting a never seen before flying weapon. To them, shocking things were just a walk in the park, although they didn't develop such bold attitudes willingly.

"All units prepare for battle! Deploy outer crust for ranged combat!"

After Dietrich gave his instructions, all the machines deployed the simple defensive equipment on the wagon. By using the cargo, the Silhouette Knights, as cannons, they displayed a part of the function of a chariot.

On the speeding wagons, the Karrdators deployed their back weapons and aimed towards the sky. In their cockpits, the reticles were also trained on the enemy ships that were just black dots on the Holo Monitor.

"... Pre-emptive strike! Start firing!!"

After gauging the range and timing the moment to attack, the Captain of Second Squad Dietrich gave the order, and they attacked the approaching Levitate Ships ferociously.

The sudden shots from the ground surprised the descending Levitate Ships. Looking down from on high and thinking they had everything in their control, they never imagined that anyone would attack the Levitate Ship immediately on sight.

"Hee, they are not afraid after seeing the Levitate Ship huh? They have guts! Let's return the favour, prepare the Catapult! Contact the other ship, we are going for a pincer attack!"

One man— Gustavo calmly instructed his subordinates to attack. The calm attitude of the commander infected the others in the bridge, and the messenger who was still a little jittery shouted the orders to the messaging tubes hurriedly.

Windows at the sides of the Levitate Ship opened immediately, and wooden platform appeared from inside, taking aim at the dust being kicked up on the road. At the same time, minute adjustment was made to the Blow Engine, and the Levitate Ship started decelerating. During this period of time, the Levitate Ship nimbly dodged through the bullets, and the two vessels caught the Silver Phoenix Knights between them and started moving parallel to each other.

"Don't need to be too precise, just fire as fast as possible!!" With a heavy thud, waves of stones were shot out of the small windows. The so-called 'catapult' were small catapults mounted on the Levitate Ship. Just simple devices that launch stone projectiles with springs, and could be easily blocked by normal Silhouette Knights.

But it was a different matter if it was mounted on a Levitate Ship. After all, the Levitate Ship possess positional advantage unlike any other weapons, so even a small and weak stone projectile would possess lethal power once it hits the ground.

The stone shells flying in with howls shattered the stone paved road with loud explosive noise. As if in retaliation of the shots fired at them, the stone shelled at them one after another. The pilots of the Tzendrinble shouted in a panic:

"Oh no, Second Squad, the road surface is filled with potholes, the wagon will flip if we continue at this speed!!"

"Well played... All Third Squad units, uncouple your wagons! Lighten your load and charge into the forest, get out of catapult range!"

Their brakes screeched and sparks flew alongside smoke as the uncoupled wagon started slowing down. The Second Squad braced themselves, absorbing the inertia of the sudden brake. Incidentally, the dust that was kicked up became a sort of smokescreen, hiding them from the Levitate Ships.

"Haha! They have amusing tricks, but this won't do! All pilots get in position! Land the ship, let us resolve this with swords!"

Right after saying that, Gustavo left the bridge and dashed for the hangar, and his subordinates followed right behind. In the meanwhile, the colossal bodies of the ships got closer to the ground, and their wake blew up waves of dust. Its dramatic movement gave the illusion of it being on the verge of crashing. The sails that were used to propel the ships acted as an air brake. The ships' altitude was lowered to about the height of trees. The next second, a large dark hole opened on the armoured ship, and Tyrants linked to heavy cranes leaped out one after another. The heavy steel armour grazed the ground, and with a loud tremor, the Black Knights descended onto the road.

After unloading all the Black Knights in one go, the Levitate Ship didn't stop. It retrieved its steel cables and continued going forward right above the height of the trees, then accelerated and flew away. Levitate Ships might be powerful weapons, but only when they were airborne. The instant when they lower their altitude and speed to unload the Silhouette Knights was its most vulnerable moment. That was why they executed the tasks of decelerating, descending, and unloading the Black Knights in one single movement. The ship crew that performed these circus-like movements were worthy of praise.

The giant figures of the Tyrants formed a rank on the road. Four fireteams, a dozen Silhouette Knights blocked the path of the Silver Phoenix Knights' Second Squad.

"I thought the Levitate Ships would attack, but it is just these Black Knights. The enemy is really busy too huh. But if the opponents are things like Silhouette Knights, I am very familiar with them. Don't look down on us, the Second Squad."

Dietrich complained as he let Guyaralinde stand up on the wagon.

He swiveled the neck of the machine to survey the situation and sighed.

The Second Squad stood off against the Tyrants who formed a horizontal wall as usual. The Tyrants didn't act rashly because of their advantage in numbers, and closed the distance slowly. Not only were the machines powerful, they were intimidating when they advanced in a tight formation too.

"We will try our best to avoid fighting... But we need to dispose of the troubles that seek us out."

Guyaralinde drew its swords. Its Ether Reactor roared, and the mana was injected into its body that was ready to pounce. The Karrdators marked with crimson crosses beside Guyaralinde also raised their weapons.

"My grudge isn't as deep as Edgar, but I have my own ideas too. You annoying people, using the technology you stole from us and showing it off everywhere..."

Dietrich stepped on a pedal, and Guyaralinde bent its body to store up energy. Its Crystal Tissue was as tight as bow strings, eager to unleash its energy explosively.

"... The price isn't cheap."

Guyaralinde sprinted, the dust it kicked up giving the illusion of being a sort of explosive shot. The Karrdators of the Second Squad followed right behind him. They were also known as the 'gangbangers' — A group specializing in offensive prowess. Uninterested in grinding out with others, their true value lies in their attacking capabilities.

"Hmmp, you dare challenge a Tyrant head on? I will show you our power!"

The pilot inside the cockpit of the Black Knight chuckled to himself. For the Tyrants with exceptional defence and power, a close frontal fight was exactly what they want. It was a fact that they had defeated Resvants with twice their numbers with ease before. In their mind, the result would be no different for this

‘Death God unit’.

In the face of the attack by the Karrdator charging straight at it, the Tyrant engaged head on. The armour on its arms was as durable as the shields of normal machines. He planned to parry the strike and then counter attack.

The powerful collision of steel resounded loud and heavily, followed by sharp screeches of friction and sparks. The pilot of the Tyrant never expected this— the Karrdator might look like a normal machine from the outside, but within it was the Strand Crystal Tissues of the latest model. Compared to it, the power output of the Resvants was child’s play. A sword strike destroyed the wrist guard of the Tyrant, and even hurt the Crystal Tissue beneath it.

“I-Impossible! The Tyrant’s armour is...!? These guys are completely different from the Resvants!”

“Oh, I can’t cut right through? The armour is tougher than it looks!”

The Tyrant stumbled back with shards of Crystal Tissues falling from it. For the Karrdator, the heavy armour of the Tyrant was unimaginably strong. If the Tyrant was on par with a Duel Level demon beast, the sword attack would have fallen it easily.

“But no matter how hard the armour is, it’s nothing compared to the Behemoth!”

Dietrich ran through the middle of the battlefield where the two forces were facing off against each other, and started attacking the two Tyrants right in front of him. As the Žaloudek side had superior numbers, he had to take on two heavily armoured Black Knights at the same time. The position of Captain sure is a thankless task— Dietrich mocked himself internally.

That might be so, he still had a plan in mind. He activated Guyaralinde’s secret weapon as he ran— The Magius Jet Thrusters embedded in his shoulder and waist armour. Guyaralinde’s equipment and Jet Thrusters had much more restrictions compared

to Ikaruga, having lower power output and could only go forward. Even so, depending on the situation, it could be a powerful technique.

A heavy and vague explosive burst pushed Guyaralinde a bit more forward from his original position, and that was more than enough. Even though the Tyrant reacted to match the Crimson Knight's speed, it missed the timing to block because of that sudden acceleration. It was possible to slow down before an attack, which was a type of feint they were wary of. However, speeding up was completely unexpected. How could a machine that moves on two legs accelerate at will?

Guyaralinde slashed its dual sword at amazing speed. Without giving the enemy a chance to react, Guyaralinde swiped the heads of the two Tyrants. After the sneak attack, the Tyrants lost their vision and had to fall back on the defensive. Although the vambrace on the two machines parried away the sword blow, it was within Dietrich's expectations. Guyaralinde deployed its back weapon Kamtha firing air blades at the Tyrant's wrist. At point blank range, even the Tyrant's heavy armour couldn't withstand the damage. It's vambrace twisted out of shape, and shards of Crystal Tissues were blown off.

It wasn't clear to him what wizardry the opponent was performing, but he couldn't just take a beating one-sidedly. The pilot of the Tyrant suppressed his wrath as he forcefully counterattacked despite being unbalanced. It might lack the usual power, but no machine could escape unscathed from a direct hit of a Tyrant's warhammer— But Dietrich was one step ahead of him. Guyaralinde used the explosive air from earlier to accelerate and retreat out of range. The pilot roared furiously, but couldn't stop the momentum of the warhammer and smashed it into the ground, cracking the road and raising a dust cloud.

Even with the power of the Tyrant, the machine still showed a gap after its attack. This was more than enough for the crimson knight. The next second, a flash of lightning appeared soundlessly— No, that was the dual swords being swung down with a speed that others would mistake for lightning.

Suppressing his surprise, the pilot of the Tyrant backed away hurriedly, and at the same time, he saw something in the air fell on to the ground. It was a giant arm grabbing a warhammer— The arm of his Tyrant that had been severed at the elbow. He stepped back with a scream, and drew his backup short mace with his left arm in a panic. The pilot's hand that was holding the control stick was sweating, and his heart was beating like drums. It was impossible to cut off the thick armoured arm of the Tyrant cleanly without extraordinary techniques. He had always thought that the armour of the Tyrant was invincible, but suddenly, they looked as frail as a strawman.

“Stand down! You all are no match for him. It is time for ‘Swordsman’ to shine!”

Before Guyaralinde could continue his onslaught, a young and cheerful voice of a man and a Black Knight came between the two of them. A strange machine that was unlike its allies was actually hiding behind the dark wall of the Tyrants.

The enemy machine was similar to a standard Silhouette Knight, and looked like an old model at a glance. But what surprised Dietrich was its overly strange feature—

"W-What the hell? ... Swords? Why do you have so many swords?"

That's right, swords. Even though swords were standard equipment for many Silhouette Knights, but the machine before him was too ridiculous. On its head, torso, shoulders, arms, waist and even legs — its entire body was covered by swords of various length. The only adequate description being a bunch of swords, the weird Silhouette Knight made Dietrich dumbfounded, but that was to be expected.

“Ah? Isn't it obvious? Swords are strong, so carrying more swords will make me even stronger of course.”

“Yes I see. So he is a retard...”

“You have swords too, but that's not good enough! You are not at the level of ‘Swordsman’ yet!!”

Right after saying that, the Silhouette Knights with plenty of swords— Swordsman pounced at Guyaralinde. Dietrich focused his attention and engaged with his dual swords.

“What chilling comedic skills! I have to handle this seriously now!”

The dual sword crimson knights clashed with the black knight with many swords. A myriad of breathtaking, high-speed blows was exchanged. In order to gain a more advantageous position and deal out more powerful attacks, their feet didn't even stop for a moment. The two machine fought in very similar ways, with a tendency for strong strikes. Compared to a single focused hit, they both preferred consecutive attacks like a typhoon. So ferocious were their exchange that the Second Squad hesitated on lending a hand.

"Bunch of swords, you are too arrogant!"

A Karrdator tried to force its way into the space filled with the howls of swords. But before that, the Swordsman sheathed its long sword and drew out a dagger as if performing a magic trick, and flung it at the Karrdator without even looking. Despite that, the dagger still flew towards the Karrdator with terrifying accuracy. "Hey, stop getting in the way. You don't even have a sword, how can you be my opponent?"

Using the chance when its opponent was unarmed, Guyaralinde shot with its Kamsa. The Swordsman evaded the sword-shaped shot, and slid into the flank of Guyaralinde, drawing and slashing its sword at Guyaralinde like a hurricane. Guyaralinde was already ready for this strike, and blocked it, throwing up sparks from the clash of arms. The next instant, Guyaralinde countered with its other arm, and the Swordsman parried with its sword blade, drawing a circular arc in an attempt to disarm Guyaralinde. Dietrich pulled his machine backward in a hurry, and barely managed to avoid losing his sword. The Swordsman with a long and short sword in either hand pressed forth towards his retreating adversary, and started his sword dance from close range.

"Ho, that was disrespectful of me. To think you can match my swords so far, you are pretty good, red one!"

"What a persistent fellow! I can't be happy when you are that ecstatic!"

While the black and crimson knights were rampaging in the middle of the battlefield with intense exchanges, the Swordsman threw out daggers at the Karrdators around him. This put the Karrdators on edge, and the morale of Second Squad was obviously waning.

"Follow Sir Gustavo! How can we Black Knights back down from something like this!?"

At the same time, the Black Knights that had been pushed back reignited their fighting spirit because of the Swordsman's might. Even though the Karrdators were powerful, the enemy's heavy armour remained a serious threat.

"Ugh, the bunch of sword guy... Looks retarded, but he is strong! He can spare the effort to attack others while fighting me... No, that just means I am being suppressed!!"

Dietrich thought bitterly as he swung his swords. Not only was he the Captain, his partnership with Guyaralinde was also the strongest unit in the Second Squad. Being suppressed proved how powerful the enemy was.

"But... This is bad, now of all times! Did I dragged on too long?" What made things worse was that Dietrich could feel the movements of his machine dulling. The reason was obvious, the fight had dragged on for too long, and the mana pool of the machine was depleting.

"Hahaha, dual sword fellow! Your movements are getting dull!! What's the matter!? You can't match me with such slow swordsmanship!"

The Swordsman suddenly increased his pressure. As Dietrich did all he could to fend his opponent off, he felt a strong sense of dissonance. The Swordsman he was fighting didn't slow down at all. Since Guyaralinde's mana pool was getting depleted, the Swordsman and Tyrant should be slowing down too, but he couldn't see any gaps in his enemy's movement. Judging from the muscle

mass of the Tyrants, they should have depleted a large amount of mana. If he was to gauge their mana reserves from their body, they shouldn't be able to even stand.

"Ah—? You are out of power huh. Well, I had fun, so it is time to end this!"

The sound of friction when the muscles of the Swordsman tightened was audible to everyone in the vicinity, and was abnormally powerful. In contrast, Guyaralinde and the Karrdators were slowing down from the lack of mana. The tables were turned in a blink of an eye, and the Second Squad fell into a desperate situation.

"... I admit that we are at a disadvantage... But, aren't you forgetting something?"

Gustavo frowned when he saw Dietrich being unfazed despite being the underdog. He is just putting on a strong front— He refuted such thoughts immediately. The pervert obsessed with swords could understand the thinking of the adversaries he crossed swords with. In his mind, there wasn't any falsehood in the Crimson Knight's fiery swords.

"... Tch, so that's how it is!"

The next second, Gustavo finally got it. But it was too late, the battle had already changed. The incredibly loud metal hooves echoed in the forest. After shaking off the Levitate Ships' attack, the Tzendrinbles from the Third Squads were back.

"Those horses aren't just used to draw wagons! We are outnumbered now! This isn't good..."

One squad (10 machines) plus the 5 Tzendrinbles transporting them were numerically superior to Gustavo's team of twelve. Considering the unknown prowess of the Centaur Knight, the difference might be even greater than the number suggests.

The sound of the hooves spurred Guyaralinde, and it committed its remaining mana, taking a stance to make its certain kill move. The Ether Reactor churned with the sharp sound of air intake at its highest power output. The tables had turned, and it was their turn

to show their ace.

The Tzendrinbles that ran through the forest charged Gustavo's team that had obviously been shaken. The fast and powerful thrust of the Tzendrinble's lance was lethal to the Black Knights damaged during their bout with the Second Squad. After the Centaur charged by, five Black Knights were utterly damaged, and fell on their knees.

"Wha... These horses are strong! Damn, they are good!!"

When Gustavo was about to counter with an angry roar, something unexpected by everyone present happened. A Black Knight incapacitated from an attack exploded without warning, and all of them were caught in the explosion before they could react.

However, there wasn't any impact from the explosion, and the surroundings were engulfed in a blinding smoke.

"Smoke... A smoke screen? Such despicable methods! Everyone retreat, we will hit our allies if we fire carelessly. Get away from the smoke first!"

Dietrich's vision was obscured and he was wary of sneak attacks from the enemy, keeping his guard up as he back away. Since they couldn't grasp the position of their allies, they couldn't fire carelessly. It was the same for the Third Squad, it was too dangerous for the Tzendrinbles to charge into a place they couldn't see.

"What the... hell is going on?"

Even Gustavo was backing away in confusion. He never heard of the Black Knights having such a function. The smoke allowed him to evade the attacks of the Centaur Knight, but he couldn't grasp the situation.

As both sides retreated at the same time, a large gap appeared between them. As if it was aiming for this moment, a gust of strong wind came from behind Gustavo, and the dust lingering over the battlefield dissipated quickly.

"That is... the Levitate Ship! It's flying back!?"

The attacks the Second Squad were wary of didn't come. In place of that, the ace of the Steel Wing Knights— a Levitate Ship appeared.

The Levitate Ship flew in at a low altitude that almost touched the tree tops, opened the bottom hatches and lowered its chains. Its intention was obvious, so the surviving Black Knights and Swordsman grabbed onto the chain and it slowly took off. As they rose, the Swordsman gave a parting speech:

"Tch! Let's continue our match another time. Hey, red one, you are pretty good with your swords. Let's fight again if we have the chance, don't die on me before that—!"

The moment the Levitate Ship pulled the Silhouette Knights on board, the Blow Engine started churning loudly, increasing speed and altitude. And of course, Dietrich wouldn't let the enemy go so easily. The Second Squad immediately fired off shots intensely, but only a glancing shots hit the target. It didn't hinder the Levitate Ship one bit, as the equipment they had on hand couldn't stop their foe.

"... They escaped huh? It's regrettable, but we took a lot of damage too. And we will need an effective weapon to take out that ship. Looks like I need to ask Ernesti to help us prepare some things."

Dietrich muttered vexingly as he watched the Ship picked up speed and left.

"... I see. So you are the one who did this. When did you do that?"

After boarding the Levitate Ship to escape and going to the bridge, Gustavo asked the person in the Captain's seat unhappily.

"Before we set off of course. This is just a trivial gift from me, but it proved useful, right?"

Kerhild replied with a devious smile as she sat easily in her Captain's seat. Gustavo was furious about being interrupted when he was just getting into the fight, but it was true that he only got out of his predicament because of her butting in midway.

"... I owe you one, but there won't be a next time."

After thinking for a moment, he left these parting words and went to the hangar to check on his men. Kerhild's smile deepened as she watched him go.

「**りエムリス兄!!**」
リースに

その声、本当にリース兄なの？

イサドラは呆然とした様子から立ち直ると、
エムリスの胸元へと飛び込んでいった。



Chapter 32: Infiltrating Lacepede Castle

In the Žaloudek eastern governance house within Fontaine city, the territory of the former Archduke Fernando was prosperous as it laid along the East-West Highway(Occident Road) and the trade route on it. In one corner of the city was an area of shops that was usually bustling with life. However, such scenes were gone after the city fell into the hands of the Žaloudek Kingdom, and it became a dead market place.

And now, the place was occupied by the Tyrants of the Žaloudek army. The giant swiveling eyeballs all around the city gaze blankly at the streets, surveilling every actions of the people on the streets.

“... When I first visited this place, it was so crowded that just walking on the street took a lot of effort. What happened here? It was such a lively city back then...”

A man who looked like a merchant grumbled as he walked along the side of the road, wary of the Black Knights’ gaze. There wasn’t any other merchants around him, and the few scant citizens on the streets were walking briskly as if they were trying not to appear conspicuous.

“I see, no wonder the Žaloudek Kingdom wants a firm hold of this territory quickly. From the looks of things, they can’t gain much from the city.

The person besides him was a servant boy wearing a low hood. He was small in stature and answered the man. The man turned into a corner with an unhappy face. They walked along the deserted alley and finally reached an old abandoned warehouse.

“Really now, I didn’t think I will ever need to be so secretive inside this city.”

The merchant sat down with a pomf, took off his coat and scratched his hair. He was the Second Prince of Fremmevira Kingdom, Emrys. By the way, the one pretending to be his servant boy was Ernesti. They used the disguise of the Silver Phoenix Merchant boldly, and infiltrated Fontaine. Although there wasn’t any point in disguising as a merchant with the chaotic economic situation of Fontaine.

“We got the gist of the city’s situation, and the surroundings of our target, Lacepede Castle.”

"I will lead the way if there is any emergency, I remember the rough layout of the city. I had been in their care... How about it? Is it time to move yet?"

After Emrys said that, he shifted his gaze to the depths of the warehouse. This warehouse used to be owned by a well off merchant and had plenty of room. After it was abandoned, the place was emptied, but it was now filled with bulky full body armour that had been painted a dark shade of green. These were the ‘merchandize’ they smuggled in by pretending to be the Silver Phoenix Merchant.

“We are ready for your command. The invisible 12 Silhouette Gears ‘Shadowlad’ divided into four fireteams, and the Knight Commander’s old Silhouette Gear model ‘Motor Beat’ are ready to go.”

Nora stepped out of the shadows and knelt on one knee to answer Emrys’ question. She was followed by several men and women. On paper, they were gathered here as the Silhouette Gear unit of the

Silver Phoenix Knights, but they were actually spies from the Blue Hawk Knights.

By the way, the dark green Silhouette Gear 'Shadowlad' was originally designed for the Blue Hawks with their spy activities in mind. The one who came up with the idea was the liaison person attached to the Silver Phoenix Knights, Nora. After witnessing the exploits of the Silhouette Gear, she was certain that it was suited for her 'primary trade'.

The new weapon known as Silhouette Gear possessed abilities craved by the Blue Hawks that was mainly an intelligence agency, which was 'fast reaction, strong and exceptionally quiet during operations'.

The biggest difference between the Silhouette Gears and Silhouette Knights wasn't their size, but the possession of an Ether Reactor. Missing an Ether Reactor might seem to be a flaw on the surface, but it was actually an advantage. After all, Ether Reactor was very noisy when in operation. Silhouette Knights used for stealth work tend to sacrifice its internal mechanism to suppress the noise, resulting in low combat capability, a major flaw. Silhouette Gears wouldn't have such an issue.

In the first place, the combat power of Silhouette Gears were far beneath that of Silhouette Knights. But compared to humans, they were a big threat, just right for the Blue Hawks who mainly deals with humans. The Shadowlad was crafted under such a background, and became the core of the battleplan this time, a good chance for them to shine.

"Well then, everyone... The Kuscheperca royals rescue plan will commence when the sun sets today."

Everyone nodded slowly after hearing Eru's orders. This was the first time in history that a Silhouette Gear unit was used in special operations.

Shortly after dusk, the streets of Fontaine turned silent. Energetic merchants already left the streets, and the citizens returned to their homes early out of fear for the Black Knights. Only a deathly silence was left, broken by the occasional footsteps of giants.

The faint sound of Crystal Tissues churning could be heard from the patrolling Tyrants who surveyed its surroundings. The optical reception device of the Silhouette Knight— its Crystal Eyeball couldn't see in the dark, that's why bonfires were lit around the streets for illumination. After confirming there wasn't anyone around from the flickering light of the fire, the Black Knight continued striding forward.

However, he was completely wrong.

On the roof of the interconnected buildings inside Fontaine city, several figures dashed by quietly. Leading the way was a dark blue Silhouette Gear— Motor Beat, piloted by the Knight Commander of the Silver Phoenix Knights, Ernesti. Behind him was Chid and Ady who were also piloting Motor Beats. Further back was the Shadowlad manned by Emrys, and the Shadowlads of the Blue Hawk Knights followed in silence.

Under the dim moonlight, the group became literally shadows. They leapt over one building after another with the power of the Crystal Tissues supported by the Inner Skeleton. The band of shadows ran without glancing sideways. The Silhouette Gears were powered by the mana of the pilot, and they showed no signs of faltering even

when moving at full speed. From this, it was clear that everyone was familiar with the operation of the Silhouette Gears.

Moments later, they passed through the commercial district and into the city center. Before them was the former center of governance surrounded by sturdy walls and moats — Lacepede Castle.

“... According to intel, the royals are imprisoned in the high towers at the four corners of Lacepede. The top of the towers are used as their cells, and our targets are there. I don’t know which tower they are in, so we need to split up and attack at the same time.”

Besides Eru were the Silhouette Gears of Chid, Ady and Emrys. The four of them were the team leaders, and would each command a group to different objectives.

“First priority is the safety of the royals. It is fine to exterminate anyone who gets in our way. Please move quietly, swiftly and accurately... Well then, let’s go!”

On the order of the Knight Commander, the shadow spread as one, and dash in four different directions quietly.

The walls of Lacepede Castle was guarded by sentries and Tyrants, but they couldn’t be blamed for not noticing the Silhouette Gears that infiltrated under the cover of night. After all, the enemy would first need to get past Fontaine city that was patrolled by the Black Knights before they could get to Lacepede Castle. There wasn’t many who would dare sneak into the lair of the Žaloudek army.

Passing through the blind spot created by the darkness, the Silhouette Gears charged out of the city, and ran for the moat and leapt.

Arrowheads were launched from their wrists with a swoosh. With the magical phenomenon of exploding air as its propelling force, the arrows flew out, with a Silver nerve attached to it. This was a device called Anchor Wire. When its tip reached the wall, it transformed into a clamp and locked firmly in place. With that spot as a pivot, the Silhouette Gears swung over the moat like a pendulum, and then grabbed onto the towering walls.

Silhouette Gears were machines that strengthened the movements of humans with Crystal Tissue. Its powerful Strand Crystal Tissue could even outperform demon beasts its size in terms of strength. The moat used to guard against men, horses and Silhouette Knights was useless against this new weapon.

The Silhouette Gears scaling the wall extended their limbs as they surveyed the surroundings. The Shadowlad's blade like fingers hung onto the protruding parts of the wall, and climbed up nimbly. The 30m wall was far taller than a Silhouette Knight, but the shadows scaled it easily without any problems.

A sentry patrolled the top of the walls. There had been no major incidents since the Žaloudek army occupied the territory, and the guard was lax in his vigilance. It was clear that he was just going through the motions.

As he walked casually, he heard the sound of the wind and stopped. Raising his gas lamp to check the surroundings, he didn't see anything out of the norm. After observing a while more, the sentry shifted the gaslamp before him and prepared to return to his patrol route—

— There was a sudden noise of something spinning and the thud of the wall being kicked. A large shadow was illuminated by the light

of the gaslamp. After landing soundlessly, the figure used a blade that was dyed black to stab the sentry.

The shadow threw down the corpse after confirming that the sentry who dropped his gaslamp was dead. Not just him, the other sentries on the wall was disposed of swiftly by shadows appearing one after another.

“No signs of the enemy.”

“Next will be a race against time, sprint there in one go.

Eru's Motor Beat overlooked the central courtyard from the wall. Compared to the tight security at the walls and the city, the internal surveillance was lax. Bonfires were sparse, and there were many dark spots in the courtyard.

After confirming that quickly, he jumped down from the edge of the wall easily. The shadow leapt from a height much taller than a Silhouette Knight. If he landed just like this, even Motor Beat would be damaged. Fortunately, the pilot wasn't any normal person.

The Motor Beat extended its arm as it drew near the surface and created a magical phenomenon. This was a concentration of air used as a cushion, 'Air Suspension' magic. By doing this, the Motor Beat negated the impact of the fall, and landed quietly in the courtyard.

Immediately after that, the Shadowlads also jumped. The limbs of Shadowlads were specially designed, with multiple joints that was bonded by Strand Crystal Tissues. Its flexible structure absorbed most of the impact, and could also reduce noise. All the Shadowlads landed safely with stances of beasts.

There were guards in the courtyard too, but they didn't notice the movement of the shadows. Not only were the infiltrators concealed in the shadow, they were very quiet despite their large stature and had a faint sense of presence. There were limits to how observant the guards could be too.

There were hordes of soldiers in the other part of the castle, but not one man noticed the infiltrators. Their guard was lax because of the security on the walls and in the city, but the more important reason was the Silhouette Gears sneaking in from a blind spot, which made this impossible mission possible.

The group ran in the dark in silence, and reached the foot of their assigned towers in no time.

"... This should be the place."

Eru shot an Anchor Wire towards the top of the tall tower. After confirming it was secured, he wound up the cable, using the pulling force to jump onto the outer wall of the tower and started running up. The Shadowlads were right behind him.

In order to imprison the valuable prisoners— royalties of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom, water tight security was deployed inside the tower. But their focus was around the room at the top of the towers, and the stairs leading there. After all, who could imagine that someone would scale the walls of the tower that was much taller than the city walls? Climbing the wall that lacked any places to hold on to would be a daunting task even for experts. Even if someone could reach the top, there wasn't any entrance save a window too small for human passage.

Unfortunately, such common sense wasn't applicable for Silhouette Gears.

After reaching the top, Motor Beat shot out Anchors to lock itself onto the wall, then use its powerful muscles to destroy the area around the small window. The stone walls crumbled, and a hole big enough for a huge full plate armour was made. It had given up any attempt of being quiet.

"... How vulgar of you to barge into a lady's chamber in the middle of the night. Identify yourself."

Before Eru finished surveying the room, a soft accusatory voice reached his ears. He turned and saw only one spot in the dim room had a light, and a lady was sitting there on a chair with a book in her hand.

"There was some inconvenience in getting in, please forgive my transgression. You are Archduchess Martina, I presume?"

"Yes I am. However, I haven't heard your answer to my question, or did you not hear it?"

She was Martina Alt Kuscheperca — who was married to the late brother of the King, Fernando, and also Emrys' aunt. Eru nodded and after a quick bow, took out a badge from his person. Engraved on it was the flag of Fremmevira Kingdom, surrounded by a Silver Phoenix

The calm Martina showed an expression of surprise for the first time.

"... That insignia. Did my brother sent his men here?"

"Yes. Time is pressing so I will be brief. We are here with His Highness Emrys to rescue you."

The sound of the door being unlocked came from the entrance. The guards on watch probably sensed that something was wrong and started to act.

"... That fool, venturing to such a place! Alright, on account of the badge and that name, I will believe you. But the Princess and my daughter are also trapped here, I can't escape alone."

"I understand, please don't worry. We have sent people to rescue the two of them, similar to this place. We made the preparation to spirit all three of you away."

Martina closed her eyes to think for a short moment, then closed her book with a thud and tossed it aside.

"Fine, after hearing you say that, I have no reason to linger in this damn cramp place. My cute knight, please lead the way."

"By your orders. Escaping might be a little rough, and I seek your kind understanding for that."

"Haha, of course! Let's get out from here and surprise those fellows!"

She spoke in a manner similar to her nephew, which made Eru smile wryly. He got on Motor Beat again, and carried Martina by

manipulating its giant arms.

“This way please... Hii!”

Right after saying that, Motor Beat jumped out of the large hole it came in from without any hesitation.

“What was that noise!?”

The next second, the soldiers flood into the room after throwing the door open. The tightly secured door became an obstacle in their attempt to stop the escape instead. When the guards stepped into the room, it was only empty, with just the icy night squall blowing in from the destroyed window.

"How is it possible... to escape from this tower!? Send men to give chase, quick!!"

The whistles of the soldiers echoed throughout Lacepede Castle.

At the moment Motor Beat destroyed the wall, the other Silhouette Gears team also reached the other towers at almost the same time.

"It's me, Emrys! Who is imprisoned here!? I'm here to save you!!"

"...!? Eh, Rys-nii!? That voice... Is it really Rys-nii?"

"Oh, Isadora!? Great, you sound lively.."

Emrys who got in after destroying the window like Eru did got off

the Shadowlad and took off his helmet.. Martina's daughter Isadora recognized his face, recovered from her daze and thrown herself into the arms of Emrys.

"Ara, it's fine now Isadora... Hey, don't cry, so even you will be afraid after getting captured huh."

"N-Not at all. I just feel bored after being locked up... No, eh..."

Seeing her stutter and wiping her tears, Emrys rubbed her head happily. Isadora got away from him in a hurry, her hair in a mess.

"Haha, it will be fine now. Since we are here, the retarded Prince won't be able to do as he please. Let's hurry on out of here!"

After Emrys got onto his Shadowlad and prepared to leave, a soft laughter reached his ears.

"Fufu, this is funny. Emrys is actually calling someone dumb!"

As Emrys dorn on his Silhouette Gear swiftly, he said gloomily:

"What do you mean by that? Forget it, time to split. Come with me, Isadora!"

He carried Isadora in one arm and used Shadowlad to send a signal. His subordinates waiting outside the tower checked surroundings, and started moving to guide him.

"It will be a bit rough, hold on tight!"

"Huh? Wait, Rys-nii... How did you get up here... Hyiii...!?"

Isadora who only felt puzzled nor didn't manage to find out before they jumped out from the top of the tower.

Towers were erected on the four corners of Lacepede Castle, and the Princess Eleanora was imprisoned in one of them. In the dim room that didn't even have a lamp, she didn't do anything and spent her time in a daze. Her entire body was devoid of strength, as if she had been locked away for ten years. However, she had been here for less than a year.

The lackluster Eleanora was like a withered flower. The Second Kingdom of the Žaloudek Kingdom, Cristóbal announced their marriage — which meant she would wed the murderer of her father and destroyer of her country— This news was a heavy blow to the Princess who was raised delicately. She couldn't accept this, but she would be killed if she rejects, and her cousin Isadora would be forced to take her place. With no other path to take, her heart weakened by her peaceful life was devastated.

In the end, she gave up resisting, and spent her days in gloom.

My way of life is much like a plant...

The blooming flower that was treated with extreme care was now abandoned like the moss on the ground. She finally realized that she never took the initiative to decide anything before.

She laid back onto her bed, and slowly scanned the room, stopping her gaze at the wall . It was a dark, boring room. Her heart was just like this dull room, locked behind thick and stifling walls without any freedom. It might look like an impressive tower from the outside, but the inside was barren.

Tears rolled down her cheeks, staining the sheets. What should she do? What should she had done? She couldn't solve the problem or offer any resistance. A sense of weakness got into every pore of her body, and she lost the strength to even sit up.

"..... Please, someone save me..."

Her faint words was proved of her will as a human, the last resistance she could give. These words softer than the brushing of leaves spread into the air around her—

In an instant, her field of vision exploded with a bang. The hard steel bars of the windows fell off, and the sturdy stone wall collapsed.

Was it the power of Eleanora's words? Of course not. A tall unfamiliar knight emerged from the breach in the wall, and he entered the room after enlarging the hole with his enormous strength.

Eleanora couldn't get up, and watched the situation unfolding before her motionlessly. More accurately speaking, she wasn't staying still because of a lack of reaction, but because she was too surprised.

"Okay, anyone here? Well... Oh!?"

The armoured knight had a cheerful voice that didn't fit the place. The arm he raised made the screeching sound of string coiling, and fire magic appeared at his fingertips. It illuminated the surroundings, and also lit up the figure of Eleanora lying stiffly on her bed.

Chid who barged into the tower inside Motor Beat also stood dazed on the spot. The flickering light revealed a petite figure of a beautiful girl about his age.

... Wah— I hit the jackpot? She must be the Princess right? ... She is as small as Eru and... really gorgeous.

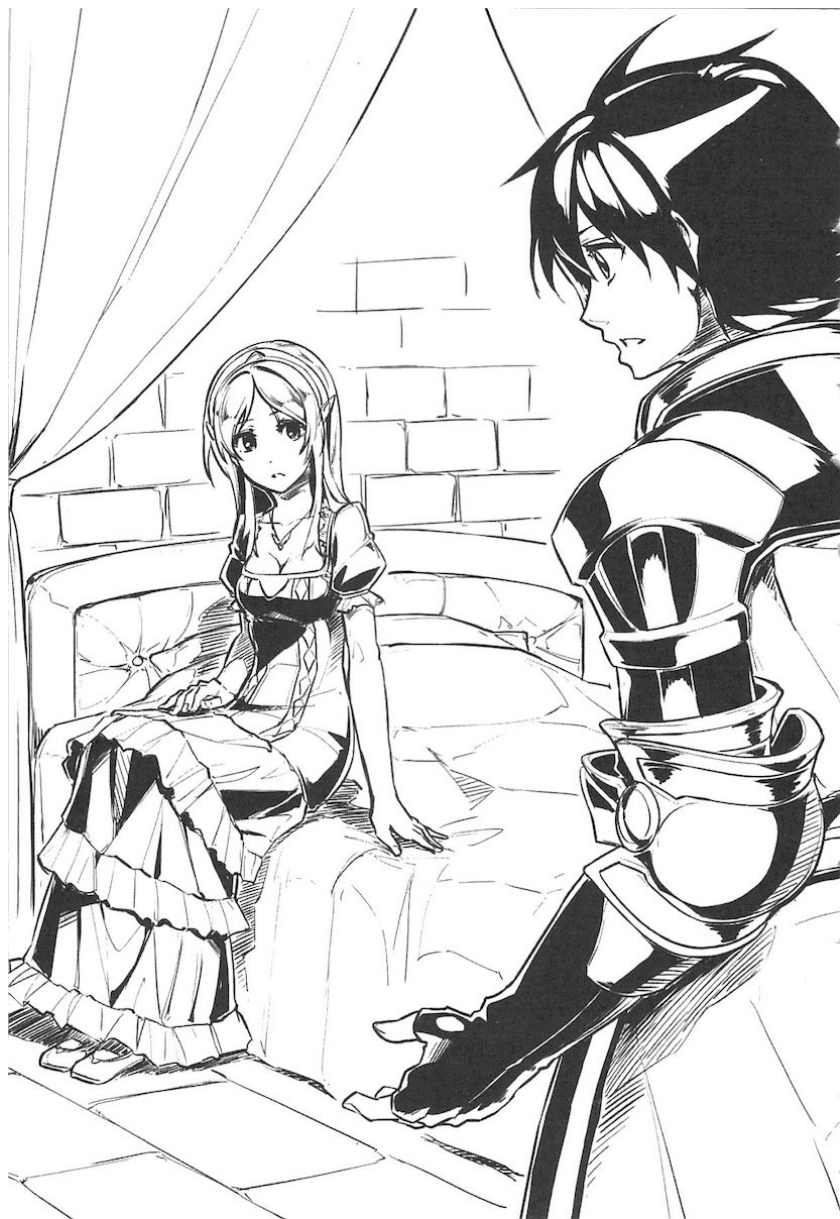
The truth was, Eleanora was frail both physically and mentally, and her beauty that got her the name Flower of Kuscheperca was gone. However, Chid couldn't see that clearly in the dim room, so she appeared dreamlike and enchanting.

Neither of them knew how to react, and they just stared at each other wordlessly for some time. Finally, Chid got back to his senses and asked her quickly:

"Erm, ah— You are the Princess of Kuscheperca correct?"

".....Yes. And you are?"

The sudden visit and unexpected situation baffled Eleanora, and she answered honestly. Her delightful voice as beautiful as birds chirping reached Chid's ears.



"I am erm... Sent from this place."

Chid secured his Motor Beat and opened the armour. His helmet and armour popped open, the parts covering his abdomen, waist

and legs opened too. He removed his armour, and took out a badge, proffering it to Eleanora. She thought a bulky knight would be under that armour, and widened her eyes in surprise when she saw the youth appeared under it. She hesitated for a moment, then inspected the badge timidly. Her education as a Princess made her realize quickly what the emblem on it mean.

"This is from Fremmevira Kingdom... Could it be, Aunt Martina's...?"

"Yup, that's it! We are here to rescue Lady Martina and the Princess... We are here to save you."

Eleanora needed some time to understand what Chid was saying. Rescue, escape, but who? From where? Thought fragments flash through her mind. She was confused and subconsciously, she just wanted to grab a helping hand. But her limbs didn't move, it wasn't that easy to wipe her mental trauma away.

"After I escape... what will happen next?"

Chid who thought the Princess would follow him immediately tilted his head at this unexpected query.

"It's meaningless to run. The country had been taken... And father is already gone..."

She was sobbing at the end. Her fragile heart couldn't withstand anymore despair, so she was afraid of the uncertain future. She feared leaving this place, and couldn't grab the hand of the knight.

She is a cute and frail just like she looks. Different from Eru after

all. It's weird for me to use Eru as the standard anyway.

Chid shook his head, clearing his head of his childhood friend who become stronger with every adversity he faced. He need to focus on the girl in front of him right now. She was unlike his childhood friend who was similar to a puny human shaped demon beast, and felt like a glass art piece that would shatter with just a touch.

"It will be fine, we have powerful allies. If we leave this place, we can send the invaders flying with our fist, and take back this country."

Even after hearing this, Eleanora showed no signs of pulling herself together, and looked even more sullen instead. Chid started breaking out in cold sweat, wondering if he said something wrong.

"I... am very weak. I am a Princess, but I don't know anything, and can't do anything. Fighting wars aside, I can't even leave this place..."

"What's the problem with being weak, knights like us will be your strongest weapon, we will don on armour and go to war with our swords."

When she heard his polite reply, Eleanora raised her head and said:

"Who would want to follow someone like me? Who would listen to the words of a tool..."

As she spoke, she remembered Cristóbal and started trembling. His face was twisted in her memories into a feral alien that feast on human flesh. Sooner or later, she would become his sacrifice.

“There is. At least I am willing.”

Chid said to her with firm determination, and reached out to Motor Beat behind him. Powered by the spell constructed by his mana, the mechanical armour was activated. It's Crystal Tissue creaked, and the steel armour slowly covered his limbs. Finally, the chest plate was closed, and his figure disappeared from Eleonora's eyes, replaced by a knight in heavy armour.

“I will be your knight and protect you. I will wield my sword for your sake, and commit to my duties as a knight.”

Eleanora looked up at the huge armour in silence. The armoured knight with the youth inside it was illuminated by the faint light. They might be different, but his figure overlapped with the people who fell in battle to protect her in the past.

"... My knight... Are you willing to live for me, and safeguard me?"

Motor Beat took a step back. Chid recalled the knight etiquettes he learned in school, and performed the most respectful rite of fealty.

“Your Highness, please bestow your first command to your loyal knight.”

Chid then waited. After a suffocating silence, he finally heard a faint reply.

“... I dislike this place. I don't want to marry the enemy who killed my father... please take me away from here.”

“By your will!”

He held Eleanora’s outreached hand, and felt a cold and soft sensation. Chid forcefully chuck these feelings to a corner of his mind, and carried her delicate body with Motor Beat as carefully as possible.

A moment later, the Silhouette Gear jumped from the top of the tower, and the Princess in its arms screamed, disrupting the silence of the night.

The Motor Beat piloted by Eru carried Martina in its arms, and stepped off the top floor of the tower. It couldn’t really be called ‘stepping off’, and was closer to freefalling, a bold manner of escaping. It felt like suicide, but Martina still gritted her teeth, enduring it silently. Ambrosius daughter had guts too.

No matter how tall the tower, you would reach the ground in a blink of an eye. As they approached the ground with great speed, even Martina couldn’t help gasping. At this moment, Motor Beat reached out the hand that wasn’t holding her, and shot out a glittering Arrowhead with a sharp screech. The Anchor Wire flew through the night sky, and used it Eru’s descent. Finally, he deployed an Air Suspension spell, and the compressed air caught Motor Beat by absorbing the force, allowing them to land safely. Eru stood up nonchalantly, and the other Shadowlad also jumped one after another.

“... Sigh... I was mentally prepared, but this is too rough. Are you really a knight? We did escape, but you really lack common sense!”

Even though Eru was used to such mobility, others might not be able to keep up. When he heard the loud protest of Martina who was breaking out in cold sweat from fear, he just answered casually.

“This is normal for Fremmevira Kingdom’s knights.”

Horrifying imaginations filled her mind as she wondered what kind of demonic place the home she left quite some time ago had become. By the way, even though there was plenty of problems with the way Eru put it, it was certainly true for the Silver Phoenix Knights

At the same time, the other teams had also got away successfully and returned to Eru’s side.

“Oh, well done Ernesti! My aunt is safe too!”

A familiar annoying voice made her turned her head, and she saw Emrys piloting a Shadowlad and holding Isadora in his arms. Martina believed in Eru and betted on him, and was relieved when she saw her daughter had been rescued.

The next one to meet them was the team led by Ady, who returned empty handed.

“Our target is empty! Ah, being carried by Eru, so envious...”

Ady’s murmurs was rightfully ignored. Shortly after that, Chid arrived with Eleonora in his arms, and the Silver Phoenix Knights successfully rescued all the captured royalty of Kuscheperca.

“All the royalties that are locked up is here right? Okay, let’s leave with haste.”

“That is true, but the castle is already in an uproar. They will definitely lock down the gates, how are you planning to escape? Can we fight our way out with these forces?”

It was natural for Martina to be uneasy, it was questioning the strength of infantry that was normal in the past. But the Silhouette Gears didn’t have such restrictions. Eru answered with a smile:

“By the way, we don’t need to pass through the gates.”

Everyone ran towards the wall, and several Anchor Wire shot out and embed it into the wall. Speed was of the essence for a plan revolving around fleeing. With no need to remain covert, the group used ‘Aero Thrust’ magic unhesitantly, giving the Silhouette Gear an explosive acceleration. Using the momentum, they dashed up the vertical wall as if they were running on flat ground.

With the dumbstruck Martina and others in tow, the Silhouette Gear team scaled the wall easily, and threw themselves into the darkness. The counteractive force of ‘Aero Thrust’ even enabled them to leap over the moat.

As if the group was traveling through a deserted area, the Silhouette Gears ran along the roofs of the rows of buildings. They mana capacity of each individual might vary, but the speed of Silhouette Gears still exceed that of horses for short distances. Before the chaos in the castle spread into the city, the Silver Phoenix Knights’ Silhouette Gear unit escaped Fontaine.

At this point, Lacepede Castle was in complete chaos, with the collation of intel a mess and unable to make any moves. After all, the sentries posted all over the place were killed, and it wasn't clear where the intruders came from, or where they escaped to. But from the panicked state the tower guards were in, it was clear that the Kuscheperca Royals had been taken away.

“D-Damn it, what a serious lapse! How am I supposed to say to His Highness!!”

The commander of the city— Doroteo's roar fell like thunder, his wrath even stopped the movements of the soldiers around him, and silence fell. He was usually calm and mild, but he was roaring like an erupting volcano.

“What happened to the thieves!? Where did they escaped too!? Anyone see the enemy!?”

“W-Well... The gate sentries didn't see any signs of the thieves escaping. There are no survivors amongst the patrols that encountered the enemy, we don't have any intel...”

As he listened to the illogical report of his subordinate, Doroteo grit his teeth tight. Realizing he was about to erupt again, the soldier took half a step back, but Doroteo just turned silent. It was pointless to vent on the troops, the important thing is to figure out the next course of action.

He must not allow the Kuscheperca royals escape. Since they were taken, he had to take them back. No matter what.

"Damn it...! I can't waste anymore time. Send out all the soldiers in the castle and city, and search the place thoroughly! In the worst case scenario, the thieves would have absconded from the city! Ready the Levitate Ship immediately, and search the region outside the city with them... We must not let them escape!!"

After saying that, he immediately took action. Making his way past the hurrying soldiers, he charge for the hangar.

Who exactly are these thieves... the remnants of the Kuscheperca? They actually kept such a powerful group in reserve? That is unbelievable. No matter who they are, I will eliminate anyone who get in the way of His Highness!

Doroteo Mardones— the famed general of Žaloudek Kingdom started his pursuit of the royals.

The Silhouette Gear team left Fontaine swiftly, and headed straight into the forest around the city, intending to throw any pursuers off their tracks. Something that was necessary for them to make a safe escape was also hidden there.

"It's a little rough, are you still doing alright? We will changing our mode of transport soon. It will take some time to prepare, please wait a moment."

Martina who was finally liberated from the arms of Motor Beat could barely stand properly. After that intense force march, even the strong willed Martina looked exhausted.

“You call that a little... What an exciting experience. However, Žaloudek will send pursuers, it won’t be easy to shake them off, what exactly are we...”

When Martina noticed the object in front of her, her voice started trailing off. Basked under the moonlight was a giant alien kneeling down in the forest, a being resembling both horse and man. It was the majestic visage of the Centaur Knight Tzendrinble.

"What in the world..."

Without any regards for Martina and the others, the members of the Silver Phoenix Knights got ready swiftly. There were two Tzendrinble and two wagons here. They jumped onto one of the wagon, then dismounted from their Silhouette Gears and started tying them down. Chid and Ady then dissapeared into the cockpit of the Tzendrinbles. The dormant Ether Reactors were revived, and the stirred Centaur Knights neighed as they woke.

Martina and the others could only stared with their eyes wide open, and were only pulled back to reality by Eru’s voice:

"Alright then, please get onto the wagon. We will be setting off immediately, and try to pull away as fast as possible under the cover of night.”

“O-Okay...”

Standing behind Martina who barely managed to squeeze out this answer, Isadora pinched her own cheeks, wondering if she was dreaming. It was already a shock to see the knights rescue them in Silhouette Gears, but the impact of seeing the Centaur Knights was much greater.

They never heard of Silhouette Knights that had gone beyond the form of humans, but since Emrys was here, that meant these creations hailed from Fremmevira Kingdom. Even though their hearts were filled with doubts, they still walked towards the wagon as instructed.

"... I haven't been back for a while, but how exactly does Fremmevira Kingdom look like now...?"

"Haha! Please look forward to seeing that. Aunt, this way!"

Martina couldn't suppress her sigh of resignation and Emrys responded by clenching his fist victoriously for some reason, and started introducing the machines to them. They were brought to the waiting room situated on the wagon, a place originally meant for pilots to rest on long voyages. It was well furnished with all sorts of facilities.

Behind Martina and Isadora who boarded with curiosity, Eleonora herself was at a loss.

"...Is this real life...?"

She only made up her mind and escaped here because she trusted that young knight, but the scene before her lack a sense of reality. She was beginning to doubt her ability to differentiate between reality and fantasy. Was being rescued and escaping Lacepede Castle just a nice dream conjured by her frail mind? Too much happened in one night, beyond what her weak spirit could take.

"Don't worry, Your Highness."

Someone in the Centaur Knight told Eleonora who was in a daze-like state. It was the voice of the young knight who whisked her away. For some reason, she could sense the presence of the youth from the Crystal Eyeball of the fearsome looking Centaur Knight.

“Leave it to me, Tzendrinble and I will definitely take you to safety.”

The words of her knight pulled her back to reality immediately. She was the one who gave the order, and wished for him to render his aid. If she couldn’t trust him, then who could she trust? Eleonora squeezed out her last bits of resolve, and stood up.

“... Alright, I will be counting on you...”

Her soft voice was drowned out by the loud churning noise of the Silhouette Knight. However, it had definitely reached that youth.

“Ohh — Chid... I had never seen you so fired up before... Are you that enamoured by beautiful princesses?”

"Shut up, I'm just... Erm, doing my part as a member of the Silver Phoenix Knights..."

“Oh— Oh fufufu ohh, that feels right, wonderful! I feel fired up too!”

"Ah—! You are definitely mistaking something, Ady!!"

As the two bickered, all the preparations were done. Eru's voice came from the Silhouette Knight on the wagon:

"Alright alright, enough you two. Everyone is ready. Well then, Silver Phoenix Knights... move out!"

With a neigh, the two Tzendrinbles moved off, heading towards the eastern borders of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom. After rescuing the captured Princess, the knights set off with powerful strides.

A Levitate Ship rode the winds as it overlooked the breaking dawn at the Aubigne mountains.

With the sound of the wind audible through the glass window Doroteo leaned back on the Captain's seat. He shielded the glaring morning sun that annoyed him with one hand.

He set off with his unit from Fountaine, and rushed towards the east of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom. As the airborne Levitate Ship wasn't affected by the terrain, it was much faster than other modes of transportation like carriages or Silhouette Knights. They had penetrated deeply into the eastern territories.

".....There... the escaped royals should be down there somewhere."

Doroteo stared at the map of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom in front of the Captain's seat. This map wasn't made hastily, but a highly accurate map they took from Lacepede Castle.

There were many benefits to using Levitate Ships as transports, but it had its own problems too. Route choices was the biggest

difference. On land, the cities and streets would determine the route, and could be used as landmarks. It was a completely different matter when looking down from the sky. It required an imagination capable of matching the information from the compass and map with the sights and terrain seen from the air— such capabilities similar to naval navigators were needed. Hence, the strategic value of a highly accurate map was immeasurable.

“As expected, the only possibility is the east.”

Large amount of text was annotated on the map, the mark of the discussion Doroteo had with the navigator to decide their course. They weren't moving mindlessly, and there were reasons why they chose the eastern route.

Firstly, Doroteo predicted that the royals would escape to the west, since they didn't have any allies even if they ran from Fontaine to the central zone of old Kuscheperca.

At that moment, he remembered the rumours of an unknown enemy rampaging in the east. Linking the unexpected rescue raid of the royals with the unrest in the east was a natural deduction.

"The possible route are either here or here. If we make use of the Levitate Ship, we can catch up no matter which path they choose."

They then locked onto the route along the highways, under the assumption that the fleeing royals would prioritize speed. They were caught in a remote path, and probably would try to avoid the same mistake. Hence, no matter what transportation mode they use, it would definitely be on the highway that facilitates swift movements.

The remaining problem would be the search area. It was extremely difficult to search at night, so Doroteo's team had been focusing on moving fast. With the break of dawn, they had to reduce their search radius. No matter how much advantage the Levitate Ship had in speed and terrain, they didn't have the leisure to search slowly.

Doroteo contemplated for a moment as the sail of the Levitate Ship bloated up. They could move freely by using the Blow Engine, but the weather also affect them greatly.

"... Another gust of wind blowing to the east. Is this a tailwind, or..."

A sharp light filled his eyes as he hurriedly issued orders to his subordinates. In the meantime, the sail caught the wind and increased the speed of the vessel. As he listened to the sound of friction from the ship, he gritted his fangs, waiting for the opportunity that would be coming.

As they hold towards the rising sun, the Silver Phoenix Knights who were escorting Martina and the others went through the Kucher road of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom, galloping at full speed.

"Look mother, we already reached here before dawn. Their appearance isn't the only thing that is ridiculous about them."

"Being weirdly shaped is one thing... But Silhouette Knights that can run faster and longer than horses, what kind of joke is this?"

After hearing the blunt way Martina and her daughter described them, Emrys responded with a shrug. The design of Tzendrinble mimicked that of a horse, its main focus was on mobility. With two Ether Reactors, its endurance was superb, and would show its true value in long distance travel. The fatigue of the pilots aside, it could theoretically run through the entire continent without needing to resupply. Ady and Chid pulled an all nighter, and the grounds they covered was astonishing. It was only natural for Martina to be stumped.

"Tzendrinble... Just why was such a strange Silhouette Knight made? Rys-Nii, your subordinate is a little strange."

"Is that so? Since horses are the knights best friend, I think this is a good idea. And when I saw it for the first time, I really want to try riding it!"

"Rys-Nii is the only one who will think so..."

Emrys tilted his head and grunted.

"It's thanks to them that we can save you like this and take you away, isn't that great points?"

Martina and Isadora looked at each other. They knew this very well and were extremely grateful, but their weary common sense just found it hard to accept.

"Don't fret the small matters. At this speed, we can probably shake off any pursuers."

"That's right. After we link up with the main forces, it will be our

time to attack! I still have a score to settle with that rumoured retard Prince!”

When she heard Emrys said that arrogantly, Martina turned to him with a serious face and said:

“Rys, listen well. You might have an unbelievably powerful band of knights with you, but the Žaloudek Kingdom is not an enemy to be trifled with. Our knights couldn’t match them despite giving everything they had. Their existence is unpleasant, but you can’t send your troops out so rashly...”

The time for idle chat was over. Alarm bells in the waiting room rang sharply. This was a simple device connected to the cockpit of Tzendrinble for communication. The sound of the bell indicates the message being sent. That bell earlier was—

"Abnormality alert... Speak of the devil. They are actually on the tail of the Tzendrinbles. You are right aunt, I am looking down on them too much."

Right after saying that, Emrys turned and charged out of the room like the wind, and head for the cockpit of Gordesleo. Martina and the others could only stare with eyes wide open at the sudden turn of events, and quickly understood what Emrys meant.

“How could it be, we already made it this far... No, how is this possible... With the speed of the Centaur Knights, they actually caught up at this place... What is going on!?”

Martina pounced on the window of the waiting room, and stared at the scene at the back with wide eyes. In the clear blue skies, she could see a black dot. She understood what they were in no time—

"Žaloudek Kingdom's ...Levitate Ship!"

The sails on both sides of the Levitate Ship was inflated to their limits, pulling the ship forward. Doroteo stood at the front of the bridge and looked with a telescope, his lips under his moustache opened in a chilling smile:

"What great timing to catch that wind, I betted on it, thinking it was some kind of divination... And won the gamble. I finally found you, Kuscheperca's royals! I won't let you escape...!!"

He pushed his aging body and crossed the bridge in one breath. Handing the telescope to a subordinate, he issued orders with a voice as loud as a bell.

"Move the Levitate Ship right on top of their head!! Then drop the Black Knights directly on them. We have to secure the royals here. Use the catapult to stop them!"

"Yes Sir, accelerating and lowering altitude!! Ready the catapults!"

His subordinates repeated the order and took actions simultaneously. The figurehead raised its manapool output to maximum and activated the Blow Engine, creating intense air flow around the ship. The Levitate Ship accelerated further as it descended. Their speed outpaced Tzendrinble greatly right now.

As the Levitate Ship drew near with amazing speed, Chid and Ady who was piloting the Tzendrinble was mesmerized.

“Hey... What is that!? A ship, a ship is coming!”

"Normal ships can't fly... Right? So someone other than Eru thought of such a weird idea..."

The two of them were excited at seeing the Levitate Ship for the first time, and even forgot that was their pursuers and started bickering. However, that all stopped when the Levitate Ship suddenly shot out something.

“Eh, oh no! They are attacking!”

As they changed their direction hurriedly, stone shells fell around Tzendrinble. The powerful shelling shook their very being as it bored through the ground with a deafening boom. Although the enemy didn't aim accurately and only a few shots hit the road, the craters it made and the way it crashed through the woods made Chid and Ady break out in cold sweat.

“Damn it, they will catch up like this. That will be terrible right?”

The Tzendrinbles slowed down as they dodged nimbly, and the Levitate Ship closed the gap mercilessly.

At this time, Doroteo and his men inside the Levitate Ship was ready to launch. He sat in the cockpit of the Tyrant, and the pilots of the other six Black Knights was also in position. He worked on the next set of controls, and had already issued all the relevant commands. The knights deftly manipulated the Blow Engine, bringing the Levitate Ship right on top of the Centaur Knights. They had lowered their altitude so much that the ship was brushing the tips of the trees. The Levitate Ship was ready to open the hatch at its belly to drop the Black Knights.

“Target locked, we need to focus. Let’s go and finish them off in one fell sweep!”

“Yes Sir!!”

The Centaur Knights seemed to be panicking as the Levitate Ship approached gradually

The next second, the canvas flew off the cargo on the wagon, and the alien-shaped demon god Ikaruga was activated. It let loose a roar, and the four arms on its back deployed speedily. Inside the cockpit, Eru ignored the tensed situation and leaned forth with his face plastered on the Holo Monitor. He showed a cute and strong willed smile, then muttered:

"Ahhh... Such, such a thing actually exist! Air Ship... Amazing, so amazing! The ship is floating in the air. Not a balloon or flying ship, it has sails... No, I don’t understand, it can’t be explained with the principles of the other world, earth. This must be, must be something wonderful I didn’t know about right!?”

The ear-shattering roar rose like a crescendo. Normal controls couldn’t keep up with Ikaruga’s complicated system, so Eru had to use his excellent calculation ability to command it directly. Hence, his will was the demon god’s will, and it was already prepared for mayhem.

"You two keep the Tzendrinbles running. That ship flying in the air... I will take it!!”

Eru instructed, and then piloted Ikaruga to jump from the wagon.

After landing, Ikaruga unleashed the massive amount of mana within it, and the Magius Jet Thrusters howled, accelerating furiously at the rate that would leave the Tzendrinbles in the dust. With the hearts of the two demon beast — Behemoth and Queen Shell Case installed, it was a unique demon god in this world. The reactionary force from Ikaruga blew the paved stones on the road away as it blasted into the sky.

"What is that!? It, it is... charging this way!?"

Ikaruga used the powerful propelling force of its Magius Jet Thrusters to soar in the air, making a beeline for the Levitate Ship. He wasn't thinking about anything, and was only taking the shortest route for the Levitate Ship, powered just by his desire for it.

Despite its excellent hovering function, it was just a ship that was propelled by the wind. It was impossible for the vessel to escape the pursuit of a demon god flying at high speed with flames burning behind it. On top of that, the Levitate Ship was lowered to a height to intercept the Tzendrinbles. The crew in the bridge screamed when they witnessed this scene from the bridge, they didn't know what that burning Silhouette Knight was, or rather, they couldn't figure out what exactly was happening. While they were falling into a state of panic, Ikaruga collided strongly with the ship.

"What happened? Something wrong!? What happened to the air drop procedure!?"

Doroteo who was waiting to launch inside the cargo bay felt something was amiss from the shaking of the ship.

"Hii! I-I don't know! Something is wrong... Is that a Silhouette Knight!? It flew in the air and landed on the ship!!"

As he listened to confused report of his subordinate, Doroteo stared at the walls of the vessel. There was a creaking sound on the outside, and he quickly realized— that was the sound of something crawling on the outer wall. He felt a chill, and after a short hesitation, he activated his Tyrant.

Ikaruga was blown off along with the wall he was clinging onto, and it started falling. Even Eru was caught off guard by this as he used his Magius Jet Thruster to adjust his posture, then pulled away.

A large hole was ripped open on the body of the Levitate Ship, revealing a Tyrant with its back weapon deployed. The Tyrant must have felt threatened, and used the crude means of blowing the enemy away along with the wall. It then continued its merciless assault on the airborne Ikaruga.

“Ahaha, that’s a nice reaction, I’m impressed! Please accept my response in kind!”

Ikaruga dodged the projectiles with its jets, then drew the Sword Cannon on its waist. The sword splitted, and mechanism inside converted a large amount of mana into flames. His counter attack was ferocious, as his shot kept piercing into the Levitate Ship like infernal fire. The spiraling flames penetrated the walls and turned the inside of the ship into a sea of fire, blasting off the walls of the vessel with ease. The Levitate Ship’s armour could withstand a normal powered shot, but was never intended to endure the demon-like power output of Ikaruga.

“Impossible, what intense might...! No, if this goes on, the Levitate Ship will crash!!”

Several options flashed through Doroteo’s mind in an instant. In

order to capture the Kuscheperca royals, he needed to airdrop the Black Knights. But if he ignored the flying demon god alone, the Levitate Ship would crash in no time. He wasn't sure if the Black Knights could stop him, but the only thing he was certain of was that losing the Levitate Ship meant his plans had failed.

“Ugh, oooohhhh!!!!”

After thinking it through, Doroteo made his call. His Tyrant lifted its shield and braved the incoming shots. The shield twisted from the direct hit of the intense projectile, and Crystal Shards fell from all over its body. Just a few shots made the machine fell on its knees, but the tough Tyrant could still move a little.

"... Turn around right now! Get out of here!!”

Doroteo's subordinate also charged forth after witnessing his action. As they sacrificed more Black Knights to block the shots, the Levitate Ship changed its course unsteadily.

“Huh? You came all this way, and is already going off? You can't do that, I won't let you escape... Hmm?”

The fired up Eru was about to pursue when he noticed the commotion behind him. Several black shadows ran across the road, chasing after Tzendrinble.

“Is that a guerilla unit? They are good...”

Eru hesitated. With Ikaruga's power, he could catch up with the Levitate Ship and bring it down easily. But that meant abandoning Tzendrinble. His own motives aside, the top priority of the Silver

Phoenix Knights should be the rescue of the Kuscheperca royals, and their safe return. What little rationality he had left stopped his desire.

"Fufu... Alright, I will keep that ship on my tab for now. The next time we meet, I will feast on it and dine on every single bit of its spare parts.!"

Eru left these words of frustration, turned Ikaruga and shot out streams of flames and heat waves, charging towards Tzendrinble at incredible speed.

Going back to the time before the Levitate Ship encountered the Tzendrinbles.

Several shadows sprinted along the forest that stretched on either side of the road. By comparing its relative size to the trees around it, the figures were 10m tall giants, Silhouette Knights. But their speed was blindingly fast, probably twice that of a normal Silhouette Knight. The strangest thing about them was that the shadows didn't make much noise while they run. Not just the movement of their Crystal Tissue, even the intake valve of their Ether Reactor was quiet, the entire body itself had a faint sense of presence.

Because it prioritizes speed, their body appeared exceptionally slender, to the extent that it could be described as frail. The most prominent thing about them was their protruding shoulders and sharp claws. Another feature was their head, which was devoid of any design, entirely smooth save the two holes for its eyes. Faceless — That was the impression the silent and phantom-like machine gave others.

There wasn't just one phantoms. Two, three— several of them were sprinting in the forest, and in the direction of their advance was the charging Centaur Knight. The objective of the phantoms was obvious, they sped up and drew near to the road, and after a powerful stride, bashed out of the forest and onto the road. It didn't make any sound during this time, and only the shadows on the ground proved they really was there. Bracing the razor sharp claws on its arms, one machine sneaked close to the galloping Tzendrinbles, and was about to rip through their armour—

“Who are you lot!? Reinforcements!?”

— But was blocked by a powerful cleaved along with an angry roar, and deflected back into the forest. The one who swung the sword was Gordesleo on the wagon, piloted by Emrys. As Gordesleo didn't have any effective weapons against the Levitate Ship, it stayed behind to guard the wagon.

“That was a close one! Did you people used that Levitate Ship as a decoy? What a sinister scheme!!”

Gordesleo got up from its knees and lift its large sword. It couldn't initiate any attack as he was on a wagon towed by Tzendrinble, and Emrys must really detest this situation where he could only defend.

He didn't have to wait very long for the phantoms to launch another wave of attack. They flew in from the forest from every direction, targeting the wagon towed by Tzendrinble. Gordesleo barely managed to ward them off with his sword, his unstable foothold hindered his counterattack and he couldn't move freely. He could fend them off for now, but his sword strike didn't feel solid, and the number of enemy remained the same. Emrys could feel the frustration in his chest building.

“I would have turned them into scrap by now if we were fighting on solid ground! But I can’t let Tzendrinble stop either.”

He wasn’t the only one who was anxious.

“They just have to pick the moment Eru isn’t around and attack! Can’t we shake them off!?”

The Tzendrinbles wield their lance to fend off the assaulting phantoms. But they were running with a wagon in tow, their defences were full of holes, much less offence. The phantoms understood this too, and attacked the backs of the Tzendrinbles ferociously. Despite their valiant efforts, the situation was dire for the Silver Phoenix Knights. On top of that, they were outnumbered, and the number of close calls they had was increasing.

The phantoms pounced again and again, Gordesleo and Tzendrinble swung their weapons to keep them at bay over and over again, but started losing focus. They were in the midst of a long distance travel, so it was only natural for them to accumulate a lot of fatigue.

Finally, they committed a fatal mistake. A phantom used that chance to pounce in.

“Crap! I can’t dodge...”

The phantom closed in on the blindspot on Tzendrinble’s flank, its hand reaching for the defenceless belly of the horse. That was the secret weapon of the phantoms, and was powerful enough to pierce through a Silhouette Knight. Right as the claw was about to

puncture the belly—

A long fire lance flew in from distance without warning and pierced the stomach of the phantom. The phantom had light armour in order to prioritize speed, and blew up instantly into wreckage. Something that was on fire was destroying the road as it charged in with a cloud of dust in its wake.

“How... dare you interrupt my wonderful time with the Air Ship...!”

It was the six armed demon faced armoured samurai shouting angrily with thundering flames in its trail—Ikaruga. Once Ikaruga caught up with Tzendrinble, it adjusted its speed by spurting up scorching flames, and landed directly on the wagon.

“Even though you can’t take the place of that ship... you will still pay with your lives.”

It deployed the arms on its back, and grabbed the back up Sword Cannons on the wagon. The way it stood looked just like a porcupine, with six Sword Cannons aimed at different directions. With a terrifying howl, the mana within the machine boiled over, and was unleashed in the form of projectiles.

The phantoms who sought refuge in the forest was blown apart along with the trees that concealed them. Even the phantoms escaping at full speed couldn’t escape and disappeared in a sea of flames as the demon god fell one phantom after another. It didn’t take much time for all the phantoms to be reduced to wreckage. Ikaruga finally let up after the surrounding terrain became unrecognizable.

An unsteady Levitate Ship was moving towards the setting sun.

It was the ship of Doroteo's group who barely managed to escape the palms of the demon god. Most of its walls had fallen, and even its steel structure was twisted into a terrible state. Forced to flee at top speed in such a sorry condition, it wouldn't be a surprise if this wreck reach its limits at any moment.

Safeguarding the 'Etheric Levitator' was the silver lining of this tragedy. If it was destroyed, the Levitate Ship wouldn't be able to fly anymore.

"... Lower the altitude, it will be meaningless if we crash."

Doroteo who was sitting in the Captain's seat said gloomingly. Since the battle with the demon god, there hadn't been any sign of their enemy catching up. On the other hand, it was getting dangerous for the vessel to remain airborne. His subordinates obeyed the orders strictly, and landed the ship.

Since the ship was out of commission, they would need to return by piloting the Tyrants. And even the Tyrants suffered heavy damage when they protected the ship, and wasn't reliable as a mean of transport.

After disembarking the ship, there was something Doroteo's team had to do, which was to destroy the Levitate Ship. Levitate Ships were the secret weapon of the Zaloudek Kingdom. It was on the verge of breaking down, but they couldn't abandon it while it could still move. The Tyrant piloted by Doroteo raised its Battle Ram stiffly.

His hands on the control stick was on the verge of shaking. Losing the ship, losing the Black Knights and even failing in his mission to capture the enemy royalty. It was difficult to make up for this mistake, he had literally lost everything. Even if he made it back alive, he probably won't have a place in the Žaloudek army anymore. I should just perish here along with the ship — Such suicidal thoughts flashed across his mind

At this moment, one his subordinates who was watching yelled and pointed to the sky. In the crimson sky in front of them was a black dot, and they quickly recognized that was an approaching Levitate Ship.

Under the night sky littered by the stars, two Levitate Ships headed to the west. One unscathed vessel towing a ship so heavily damaged that it was a miracle for it to be even floating. And of course, that was Doroteo's ship. They maintained just enough altitude to fly, and were ready to abandon ship if anything goes wrong.

Having dismounted from the Tyrant, Doroteo glanced at the machines they recovered and the faces of his subordinate and seemed a little relief. But his face turned sullen quickly, and left in crude strides as if he was trying to shake all this away. He went from the cargo bay to the bridge, and surveyed it from the ladder he was scaling. He was staring at one spot— the person seated in the middle of the bridge.

".....Lady Hietakangas, so it was you."

He said the name of the female knight who occupied the captain's seat so naturally. She belonged to an order of knights from Žaloudek Kingdom, the knight commander leading the Copper Fang Knights, Kerhild Hietakangas. She was wearing an annoying smile that never seemed to change, as she sat relaxed on the chair with her hand supporting her chin.

“That’s right, you got a problem with that?”

“... Of course not. You saved my subordinates, I can’t thank you enough...”

The two of them didn’t have much of a relationship. Truthfully speaking, most people didn’t feel much affection for Kerhild who worked in the shady side of business. Seeing Doroteo’s unusually frail expression, she asked curiously:

“What happened? You climbed to your position by your own merits, not by kissing the ass of the prince. But look at you now, this isn’t normal.”

Doroteo had a bitter face as he recount his failures in recent days.

“... That’s what happened. Age is getting to me. The enemy has nightmarish powers that exceed those of normal Silhouette Knights. To think I am rendered so helpless, how incompetent.”

Even the seasoned veteran found the demon god that forced them to this dead end to be an incredible opponent. The combined effort of him, his subordinates and the Levitate Ship was ravaged so badly by that one machine.

“... This is the end for me. I can’t make up for this loss even if I pay for it with my life.”

The man before Kerhild was no longer the top general of the Žaloudek army known for his boldness and calm mind. Seeing how weak he seemed to be, Kerhild frowned and lashed out at him:

“Tch! You think presenting your wrinkled head mean you are taking responsibility? How incredibly foolish.”

“... Then... How do you think I should compensate such a grave mistake?”

“War maniacs are really...! Listen up, it is true that losing the Levitate Ship, the Black Knights and the royals are terrible. But, it is even worst to not bring back any intel on the enemy.”

Kerhild's Copper Fang Knights was a spy organization, mainly charged with the collation of intelligence. Depending on the circumstances, the intel might have higher priority than their lives. Her view that ran contrary with that of knights sent Doroteo into deep thought. His sullen eyes regained some of its light.

“You are right. The enemy was obviously abnormal, and will definitely be an obstacle in the ambition of His Highness. I need to convey the details so His Highness can make adequate preparations. Whatever happens to this head after that don't matter.”

Even though he had a bit more life in him, Doroteo was still saying the same thing. Kerhild looked up in exasperation.

“Yes. Since you are going to die, then do that after duking it out with the enemy.”

He even responded with a nod seriously to this joke-like response. Kerhild was starting to get tired of his foolishness.

In old Kuscheperca's capital, Delvincourt. Ever since King Aukusti's death after his duel, this city became Zaloudek Kingdom's largest base. With the invasion of Kuscheperca almost complete, it will be

designated as the capital of the Kuscheperca territories — ruled by Žaloudek Kingdom, the governance house would be in the old royal castle.

Under the grey and gloomy sky, a Levitate Ship reached Delvincourt. After its masters were changed, a ‘harbour’ for Levitate Ships to dock in was built in Delvincourt. Even though it was just clearing out a piece of land and constructing ramps to access the vessels easily, it was still used frequently as a military stronghold, and the ship that just reached also found a spot to land.

Shortly later, in the audience hall of the central governance house—which used to be a royal castle—the unhappy voice of Žaloudek Kingdom’s Second Prince Cristóbal•哈斯洛•Žaloudek could be heard.

“What did you say— The Princess was taken away...!?”

The Prince rose from the throne that used to belong to the King of Kuscheperca agitatedly. The man who was prostrating with his head to the ground before him, his most trusted right hand man—Doroteo Mardones’ Levitate Ship just landed, and reported to his master right away.

"Doroteo... how can a man like you not know the value of that wench!? You let her slip away into the hands of mere bandits, and even let the Black Knights and Levitate Ship suffer serious damage as you shamelessly flee here, what is the meaning of this!?”

Cristóbal’s angry roar resounded in the hall once more. In the face of the nonstop accusations thrown at him, Doroteo remained prostrated on the floor without a word.

"That’s enough, Cristóbal. As the commander-in-chief, how can you

lose your composure?”

A nonchalant voice sounded out from the entrance of the hall, restraining Cristóbal's rampage. It was Cristóbal's elder sister — The First Princess Catalina.

"Sister... But!!"

"Calm down. You should understand Doroteo's capabilities and loyalty very well correct? Admonishing him any further would just be a waste of time, the important thing is to understand what exactly happened."

Her calm analysis made Cristóbal flinch. He exhaled deeply to steady himself, then tried to act calm as he turned towards Doroteo and said:

"... Raise your head. Report the entire incident in detail. I will decide on your punishment after hearing it."

"Yes my liege!"

Doroteo finally raised his head, but kept his body low as he reported on the thieves who infiltrated Lacepede Castle.

"... And so, when I realized it, all the Kuscheperca royalties had been taken. My incompetence is to blame, I am willing to accept any punishment Your Highness metes out."

As he listened, Cristóbal's expression turned sour. To them, the royals of Kuscheperca— Especially Princess Eleanora, was a 'tool' to

stabilize their rule over the Kuscheperca territories. Although Žaloudek possessed overwhelming military power and could do as they pleased with the lands of Kuscheperca, it was always better to have less problems.

“Not just the Princess, but all of them were taken. Unbelievable, you were actually had by the weaklings of the Kuscheperca army...”

After thinking about it calmly, Cristóbal started feeling doubtful. He knew Doroteo for a long time, and he might be getting a bit old, but Doroteo still ranked amongst the top five of the Žaloudek army. He couldn't imagine him being toyed by the Kuscheperca soldiers that were no more than prey to them. As he pondered with a palm on his head, Catalina who was also contemplating lift her head and said:

"I think that even if Kuscheperca attacked with a thousand men, it would be impossible for them to seized the royals under Doroteo's watch. Then the ones behind this incident... are agents from another nation."

“Damn it, so that's what happened! Tchh, I thought they will only act much later, but they actually barged in at this crucial moment!”

After hearing what his sister said, Cristóbal groaned with a bitter face. He thought of a problematic possibility. Assuming the ones who took the royals were nobles of old Kuscheperca, it wouldn't be that much of a problem. It is still a problem, but they just need to take advantage of their military forces to suppress them again. However, if a third nation was behind this, then things would become tremendously complicated. If the 'legitimacy' known as the royals were taken, it would be very troublesome.

He already knew that other nations would interfere sooner or later,

but for the Žaloudek Kingdom who spent a huge amount of time to prepare and launched their campaign with lightning speed, they completely didn't expect a nation to respond this quickly.

“... What comes to mind are the Eleven Flags interfering in a roundabout way, or the remnants of Locard Allied Union.”

Cristóbal's guesses were rejected by Catalina who shook her head.

"No matter what, the problem is that in order to control the nobles of Kuscheperca, we had already send out news that you and Eleanora would be getting married. It would be a huge disgrace if we lost her."

Catalina's fine face was frowning from anxiety, this incident wasn't pleasant for her, the administrator who proposed the plan. At this moment, Doroteo who kept his head lowered quietly interjected:

“Pardon my interruption, but I don't think they belong to those groups.”

“Oh? What are your reasons for such a claim?”

Cristóbal urged him to go on suspiciously. But before he spoke, Doroteo slowly removed his sheathed sword, and respectfully proffered it to Cristóbal.

“... What is the meaning of this?”

"From this point on, my words are absolutely true, if Your Highness so much as suspect it... Please cut my head off immediately."

When he heard that, Cristóbal gritted his teeth, and Catalina also raised her eyebrows. Since Doroteo bet his life on his words, that would mean—

“The incident is that hard to believe?”

Doroteo affirmed with a silent nod, with his sword held high with his palms. Cristóbal considered briefly, took the sword and unsheathed it. The workmanship was crude, but it was clear that it had been carefully maintained from its shiny blade.

“Hmmp, I won’t doubt you, but I accept your resolve. Don’t hold back on ceremony, speak.”

“Thank you for Your Highness for your mercy... After the royals escaped, I gave chase on the Levitate Ship... And found them escaping along the highway on Silhouette Knights with its top half human, and bottom half horse.”

Cristóbal exhaled deeply, swallowing his urge to say ‘How is that possible’. His blade never left Doroteo’s neck all this while, and Cristóbal wasn’t foolish enough to doubt Doroteo’s words.

“I finally understand why you are betting your head on this... What kind of monster is that? An ancient demon beast that had gone extinct?”

“Forgive me for being blunt, they seemed to be Silhouette Knights crafted by the hands of men. They were extraordinary fast, as if they were warhorses, and I wouldn’t have caught up if I didn’t have the Levitate Ship.”

Cristóbal frowned. Their mass produced machine Tyrants were perfect in defence and offence, their only flaw being its slow speed. Opponents that had the characteristics of warhorses were their nemesis. This much was ridiculous enough, but he didn't expect Doroteo to only get into the main point now,

"That wasn't our only foe. We attempted to close in with the Levitate Ship to seize the royals, but we encountered a demon god like adversary with multiple arms with flames sprouting from it, flying in the air. It damaged the Levitate Ship with powerful weapons I had never seen before..."

"... Wait, hold on Doroteo! What are you talking about!?"

Cristóbal who was listening to Doroteo's report carefully interrupted when he realized the contents were becoming ridiculous.

"I am talking about the enemy's Silhouette Knight of course. Before we even landed, that thing flew into the air and almost sunk our Levitate Ship. Aside from that, it's magic projectile attacks were strong enough to stagger the Black Knights with just one shot, so we had to abandon our pursuit... If Your Highness think these are all just my excuse to escape the blame, please use that sword to..."

"Tch! Stop blabbering about that! This thing is... really hard to imagine."

Even Cristóbal couldn't help moaning. The report Doroteo made with his life on the line couldn't be false, but a part of his mind was certain that he had mistaken something. At the side of Cristóbal who had fallen into confusion, Catalina noticed a fact:

"... It might be a Silhouette Knight more powerful than the Black Knights. Leaving its weird appearance aside, it meant its country of origin possess an advanced level of technology. Doroteo, are you insinuating that the nation didn't 'develop new technology', but 'already possess such technology'?"

She probably wasn't certain, so she was asking quietly. Doroteo nodded in agreement:

"I have one point to add, amongst the escaping royals is the spouse of the late Archduke Fernando — Martina Alt Kuscheperca... She was a princess from Fremmevira Kingdom. And the direction they fled in, the east, was where that country lies."

"You mean the demon beast watch dogs? Those country bumpkins are here to join in the fun huh?"

They thought of many possible enemy states, but not Fremmevira. After all, that country was outside the Western League of Nations (Occident). They had some run-ins with them in the past, but lost interest quickly.

"Perhaps they are doing this out of kinship, or they just want to seize Kuscheperca's lands. The more serious problem was, the royals who escaped has linked up with a force powerful enough to stand up against the Black Knights. I think their numbers are limited, but the situation doesn't look good."

Catalina felt that there was a need to amend the original battle plan. After identifying the enemy, it wasn't clear how it would affect future developments. The only certain thing was that they had fallen one step behind the complete domination of the Kuscheperca territory.

When Cristóbal heard this news, he turned dramatically, walked to

the throne and sat down again. He was obviously emotional, but his expression had a hint of something other than rage.

"... Fuhahaha! Things are becoming interesting. Adversaries that surpasses the Black Knights! There isn't any thrill no matter how many Kuscheperca soldiers we defeat, I was just starting to get bored."

Catalina behind him was obviously frowning. Even though her brother was a royal, his personality was violent and craved battle instead of statesmanship. Always seeking 'worthy foes' was a bad habit of his.

"Cris, this is not the time for you to amuse yourself."

"I know sis. Just find the enemy, and send troops to take them out. War is my forte, I will leave the aftermath in your hands."

Cristóbal got up like an uncaged beast. He was the Commander-in-chief of the invasion force, this fact didn't change when the main directive changed from invasion to occupation. On the other hand, Catalina oversees all administrative matters, and would have a hard time stopping Cristóbal in his military decisions.

"In that case, we need to hurry with the attack on the eastern territories... and crush them early, there is no time to waste. The royal family still lives, and is scheming a counterattack. If this news spreads, the regional resistance movements will intensify."

His expression was lively, and didn't look like he was describing the disadvantage of his army. Since the royals were rescued, their opponent would definitely spread the news quickly. After all, the main reason Kuscheperca collapsed so quickly was because the

royal family which was the heart of the Kingdom went missing. And so, the opposite would apply too.

“A tool just needs to be used docilely. How dare you defy me, I will make you and the bumpkins from the other side of the mountain pay for this with your lives!”

Crushing the enemy’s plan to resurrect their resistance efforts was the utmost joy for him. Seeing Cristóbal on the verge of launching an attack, Doroteo tried restraining him:

“Please wait. The number of Black Knights deployed in the east has decreased, and we know the enemy is more powerful. It wouldn’t be wise for Your Highness to go there directly...”

That’s the result of the Silver Phoenix Knights active efforts. Although the Žaloudek Kingdom still ruled the territory, they didn’t have the forces to launch a punitive campaign. Cristóbal’s mood worsened immediately, and Catalina said resignedly before his emotions plummeted completely:

"Cris, Draw some of the Black Skull Knights stationed in the south over. And commit the former Kuscheperca forces too. They can’t match the Black Knights, but they are still Silhouette Knights."

“This is such a hassle. But if we want to crush them before that country intervenes, we will need to muster sufficient forces too.”

Cristóbal groaned, then sat back onto the throne.

The direction Žaloudek Kingdom will be taken had been set, and his written orders were sent to the territories around Kuscheperca very soon. The Black Skull Knights— the best elites of the Žaloudek army set off towards the east, closing their encirclement net around the

Kuscheperca royals.

After concluding his report, Doroteo left the audience hall with heavy steps. He had relayed all the information he needed to, but the fact that he committed a serious blunder, and even troubled his lord to take action personally. That was the biggest thing he couldn't forgive himself for.

"...Dad."

"Gustavo, I heard. You lost too."

The adopted son Gustavo walked towards his sullen father. He suffered great losses in his fight with the Silver Phoenix Knights, so both parent and child failed in their task.

"I am sorry, this is too unsightly. Did His Highness said anything? Did he lectured you sternly?"

"We won't be seeing any action for the time being. His Highness wants us to stand by until we are needed again."

The chair Doroteo sat on squeaked, and he sighed. Frankly speaking, his punishment had been put on hold. It was an unforgivable mistake, but considering the developments in the future, it would be a pity to execute such an excellent general like him. So before the issue in the east is resolves, he would need to reflect on his actions behind closed doors.

“The enemy I fought was a real challenge, in a completely different league from the strawmans from Kuscheperca. Now is the time they need our swords.”

“We have to bear with it for now... Sooner or later, we will get to bet our lives on the line and restore our honour. That death god won't be sitting pretty in the meantime.”

The image of the destructive god flashed across his mind. Its existence will definitely spell disaster for the Žaloudek Kingdom, Doroteo was certain of that. He had decided how he would spend his life that had been spared.

While parent and child were wallowing in their sorrows, a subordinate appeared, reporting the visit of an unexpected guest.

“Apologies for disturbing your rest. Lord Doroteo, can I have a word?”

"You are... Lord Collazo... correct? I remember that you should be stationed back in our home nation, why brings you to the front lines?"

The visitor was the Central Workshop Director of Žaloudek Kingdom, Horacio Collazo. Doroteo got up to meet the guest with his head tilted in confusion. He couldn't understand why a non-combat personnel came all the way to the foremost frontline in Kuscheperca territory.

“Nothing much, I just need to keep challenging myself in order to do more for the sake of His Majesty. Hence, I hope everyone can provide me with your opinions from the battlefield.”

As a general and pilot, Doroteo couldn't understand the thoughts of

a technical personnel, but he could feel the sincerity of the other party. He happened to be confined to quarters and had plenty of time, so Doroteo agreed to the request with a nod.

"Since this is the request of Lord Collazo, I will do what I can. So, what information do you need?"

After hearing that, Horacio twisted the corners of his lips in a smile, and spoke persistently stubborn words"

"... I heard a Levitate Ship had been taken down, so I hope you can tell me how the enemy looked like in detail..."

At this moment, Doroteo felt something completely different from the usual Horacio he knew, an eerie passion and spirit.

Arc 8: Princess of the Fallen Kingdom

Chapter 33: Hoisting the flag of the Silver Phoenix

In the eastern territory of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom. Stretching all the way to the foot of the Aubigne Mountain Range, these lands were mostly covered by forest with undulating terrain. The Pan-Kucher road was paved through the vast forest, connecting the various regions of Kuscheperca.

"... Even though Fontaine had fallen, the atmosphere in this forest remains the same."

Martina who leaned out of the wagon to survey the scenery frowned as the wind blew in her face. The lush greenery seemed oblivious of how the nation was suffering, and was serene as usual. As they went further away from Fontaine, the melancholy in her heart became lighter. That city which was currently under the rule of Žaloudek Kingdom's eastern governance house used to be the territory of his late husband, Archduke Fernando. That's right, the Lacepede Castle they were held captive in was the place she used to reside in, and where her late husband was murdered. No matter how strong a woman she was, there was still a limit. If she was kept there any longer, it wouldn't be hard to imagine her doing something rash because she couldn't take it anymore.

"We are finally taking the first step. I will retake this Kingdom from the hands of those bastards, Fernando my love... Please watch over me."

She had a mission, a mission entrusted to her by her brother-in-law, the king, and her husband. Martina's heavy words filled with determination were lost in the wind blowing through the forest. No one heard her murmurs, but her nephew who should be sound asleep inside the waiting room changed his breathing pattern unnaturally for a beat. The two Tzendrinbles and the wagon they were towing continued to move, heading towards the grand and sturdy Aubigne Mountains.

C.E. 1281, this turbulent year was worthy of a special mention even in the long history of the western continent.

The countries located in the west of Zetterlund Continent—known collectively as the Western League of Nations. Amongst them, the powerful Žaloudek kingdom' invaded its neighbouring country suddenly, which started what was known as the 'Western Grand Storm' by future generations.

The Žaloudek Kingdom committed overwhelming forces, and conquered the Locard Allied Union in a blink of an eye, and proceeded to invade Kuscheperca Kingdom thereafter. The Žaloudek Kingdom and Kuscheperca Kingdom were both large and prominent nations in the west, and were virtually equal in their military might. In the beginning, the surrounding nations also thought that this would be a drawn out war. But the Žaloudek Kingdom took full advantage of their powerful Silhouette Knights made with revolutionary technology, and together with the first practical application of an airborne weapon, Levitate Ships, turned the battle into a one-sided affair.

The result was surprising. In just half a year, Kuscheperca had fallen.

"Rys-Nii, where exactly is this wagon going? Are we going over the mountains?"

Isadora stretched her limbs that had gotten stiff from sitting inside the entire day, and asked Emrys. Since their escape from Fontaine, they had been traveling during daytime for several days. Considering Tzendrinble's speed, they should have travelled quite some distance, and will cross the Aubigne mountains into Fremmevira Kingdom if they kept up this pace. Taking into account Emrys' status, it was definitely possible for them to seek refuge there temporarily.

"No, I can't give that side any trouble. I already promised my dad. Our destination is somewhere closer."

"The Centaur Knights arrived here very quickly, but what are you planning to do in this country? The Black Knights will surround us very soon."

Seeing Isadora lower her eyes gloomily, Emrys puffed his chest out confidently for some reason and declared:

"Don't worry Isadora. We didn't come here without a plan, of course we are prepared to strike back...! The Silver Phoenix Knights will take care of that!"

"Rys-Nii, at least say that they are doing so on your orders..."

Isadora didn't understand where his confidence was coming from, and felt worried. She turned her gaze to the wagon travelling beside them with such a thought in mind. On it was the six armed demon god in standby, it was the machine that fended off the Levitate Ship by itself. She realized she was holding onto some expectations— Since his subordinates controlled such fearsome weapons, he must have some unimaginable plan.

And soon, she would witness just what the Silver Phoenix Knights could do—

Shortly later, a scene different from the forest appeared in front of them, it was the city that became prosperous as a relay station situated right next to Pan-Kucher road, Missillier. The Tzendrinbles that had been travelling at top speed eased their pace when the city came into sight. Missillier was surrounded by crude walls, and a flag was flown on top of it. It wasn't the flag of Žaloudek Kingdom, but one that bore the emblem of a Silver Phoenix. Tzendrinble waved a flag in response, and the gates opened to receive them.

“Phew, that was tiring... Tzen-chan worked hard too!”

“They were the one running, but we the pilots are tired too.”

The Tzendrinbles passed through the gate with the sound of intake valves that seemed exhausted. When the people in the city noticed that and looked their way, the Tzendrinble had already reached the hangar. The pilots Chid and Ady looked completely worn out, and after uncoupling the wagon, they entered the workshop with wavering footsteps. The two machines had been worked really hard in this long journey, and would need a complete overhaul. The craftsmen who came to take over thanked the twins for their hard work, and started unloading the Silhouette Gears on the wagon.

"Rys, is this city fine? Although it didn't appear to be under Žaloudek's rule from how easily we waltz in here..."

"Don't worry aunt. See that flag? The Silver Phoenix is our trademark."

The door to the waiting room on the wagon opened, and Martina pushed her face out. The loud noises coming from around her made her squint. Craftsmen bustled around in Silhouette Gears to unload the cargo, and in the workshop besides the hangar were a group assembling Silhouette Knights. This place had all the liveliness that Fontaine had lost.

After being freed from imprisonment, they felt deeply moved by the lively scene. Behind them, Ikaruga made noises unique to Crystal Tissues and stood up.

"I will hand Ikaruga over to the guys in the workshop. Young Master, please take everyone to their lodgings."

Emrys raised his hand to acknowledge, and led Martina and the others in the direction of the city center. They didn't walk for long when a carriage came to a stop before them. A man rushed out of the carriage. He was Baron Modesto Letonmaki, a minor noble who held a small piece of land in the east.

"Ohh! Lady Martina, you are safe. Lord Emrys did mention that... Ahh!!"

He noticed the person hiding behind Martina, and got down on one knee with a deep bow, even though they were on the side of the road.

"Princess Eleanora, you must have had a hard journey. I am relieved to see that you are well."

Eleanora Miranda Kuscheperca, the only child left behind by King Aukusti who fell in battle, the sole heir to the throne by her royal

Kuscheperca bloodline. When they heard Baron Letonmaki's passionate words, everyone understood what was happening and also bowed on their knees.

Eleanora who was raised in a delicate environment wasn't used to such a direct display of fealty. In place of the troubled Eleanora, Martina announced to all those around her:

"Lord Letonmaki, and everyone present, please rise. I am honoured by everyone's gesture, but ever since we were rescued, the Princess just arrived after a long journey and is tired. I hope you can be so kind and lead us to a place for us to settle down."

"Yes, pardon my lack of consideration. Allow me to lead you to your lodgings, this way please."

Baron Letonmaki stood up and ushered them onto the carriage, instructing the driver to head for the center of the city.

"You had a long journey too, Lady Martina. Aren't you tired?"

"I am a little tired, but I don't have the leisure of rest with the way the nation is. I want to discuss plans for the future immediately..."

As Martina dragged her exhausted body to act, Emrys interjected suddenly:

"Lord Letonmaki, why don't we continue the 'trade' we talked about last time? Everyone is here anyway."

"Yes, they can't wait anymore. We have questions about those

blueprints you sent us.”

A short while later, they reached a large building in the city center. Letonmaki ordered his servants to bring the Princess and Isadora to the room, and led Emrys and Martina to the war conference room. There was already a large group waiting for them in there.

The Baron announced loudly when he stepped into the room:

“Good news everyone. The Silver Phoenix Merchant rescued Her Highness Martina and Isadora, and even saved Princess Eleanora!”

A loud cheer shook the entire conference room. Not too long ago, Žaloudek released news that Second Prince Cristóbal will be marrying Princess Eleanora, which hit the surviving nobles hard. Unable to offer any resistance, this marriage will mark a clear end of the royal bloodline, a cruel announcement of Kuscheperca’s defeat.

Now that the Princess was saved from the claws of Žaloudek, it was only natural for them to be surprised and happy. Inside the rowdy conference room, Martina looked at each of their faces and asked in surprise:

“Why is everyone gathered here...”

The conference room was filled with the nobles of old eastern Kuscheperca Kingdom. Martina was the archduchess, and was well connected in the eastern territories, most of the nobles present had dealings with her. They all had one other common point, which was their relatively lower noble peerage.

“Allow me to give you a brief explanation.”

Baron Letonmaki who led them here explained the situation— After capturing the royals of Kuscheperca, Žaloudek Kingdom quickly extended their reach all over the nation, and their next target was the grand nobles in the nation. A lot of them died in battle alongside the king when the capital fell, and the survivors were left on their own, defeated one by one by the Black Knights. Some of them surrender to the enemy to save their own live, but their military asset and wealth were confiscated, stripping them of their aristocratic power. Žaloudek kingdom, brutally executed their invasion utterly.

With most of the grand nobles eliminated, the lower ranked nobles were ignored. Taking out all the nobles would take a lot of effort, and completely destroying the governance system would be to Žaloudek’s disadvantage instead. In the end, they only sent out periodic patrols to inspect on the weaker nobles to maintain superficial control over them.

“... While we were being suppressed, a group proposed an interesting ‘business deal’ to us.”

Baron Letonmaki looked straight ahead as if he was implying something, and Emrys patted his chest proudly. When Martina’s face changed from confusion to irritation, Emrys showed a wide devious smile, then straightened his expression and posture, adopting respectful mannerism jokingly:

“Thank you for your kind introduction, we are the Silver Phoenix Merchants, a caravan that just happened to be passing by. We came from the east on the other side of the mountain, and saw that Kuscheperca Kingdom seemed to have met with some trouble. We know that it isn’t our business to intrude, but we couldn’t restrain ourselves from lending a helping hand.”

When they heard Emrys' stiff and monotonous lines, even Martina who had been talking all this while turned quiet, unable to answer.

“Merchants you say...? No, that's too fake right? It is obvious that Rio-Nii sent you all here to help.”

“Oh! But Dad said no matter how fake it is, the first one to say it will win!”

“Really now... I am really touched by how considerate Rio-Nii is...”

Martina could only answer with a sigh. Despite bringing an extraordinarily strong Silhouette Knights unit, her nephew still insisted that they weren't here for 'international diplomacy'. She understood the reasons why they had to go about it in this way, but their cover story still made her speechless.

“It is thanks to the aid of their merchant group that all of us can gather here like this.”

The Silver Phoenix Merchants who arrived in the eastern territories performed 'procurement' that was actually attacks on the Žaloudek army. After suffering losses on multiple occasions, the aggravated Žaloudek army started consolidating their forces to counter. In the end, the patrols frequency in the east fell drastically, and they overlooked their vigilance over the weaker nobles.

“Next, the merchants... Lord Emrys headed towards Fontaine to rescue the Princess, and notified us to gather at the same time. We have completed our given tasks, and would do whatever we can to recover our nation's territory.”

The nobles present also nodded in agreement. Even though she could see the determination on their faces, Martina still shook her head slowly and said:

“I am grateful that you think that way, but how should we go about taking back our Kingdom? It is vexing to say this... But our Silhouette Knights, the Resvants are far inferior to their Black Knights, and have no chance of winning in a proper fight. We have not won even once, and we can't depend solely on Rys and his men correct?”

From their experience after multiple encounters, three Resvants could roughly match one Tyrant, which was the consensus of the two armies. This meant that to defeat one Tyrant, three Resvants would need to attack it in concert.

Practically speaking, things weren't so simple. Žaloudek army's tight rank formation which was like a wall widens their strength difference. In the face of the tight enemy formation that was difficult to defeat with numbers resulted in losses after losses for the Kuscheperca army. And the Levitate Ships dealt the final blow to them. The never before seen weapon that moves freely in the sky overturned the world's strategical and tactical rules.

“Hmmp, we are not the only ones who will fight... But leave that aside for now. Aunt, and everyone here, we are merchants after all, so we hope you will purchase these merchandize.”

Emrys walked before the group in high spirits and snapped his finger. A petite youth entered the conference room as if he couldn't wait any longer. With his silver hair bobbing on his head, he had a bright smile on his cute face. Knight Commander of the Silver Phoenix Knights, Ernesti spoke in a casual tone:

“Pardon for the sudden entrance, I will now introduce the latest merchandize from the Silver Phoenix Merchants to everyone. First of all, I will confirm this, the two biggest problem before us— The difference in performance between your knights and the enemy’s knights, and the means to fight against the Levitate Ships. The Resvants couldn’t handle either of them.”

Edgar and Dietrich who appeared behind Eru suddenly were quietly assembling a blackboard nimbly with practiced hands. Eru quickly pasted some papers onto the board and smiled:

“And so, we the Silver Phoenix Merchants have prepared a proposal to resolve these issues. Please take a look at the design plans I had given out. Like this...”

Eru’s blue eyes had a creepy shine about them, and he looked very happy. He then started his briefing, something he was familiar with in his old job as an engineer.

“According to your explanation, if we use this, we can take part in the battle too. However, this isn’t the only issue.”

After Eru finished his presentation, the Kuscheperca nobles in the conference room were still groaning with a stern face. Considering how futile their resistance had been, the Silver Phoenix Merchants’ proposal was plausible, but the wariness of the weak nobles kept them from agreeing so easily.

“The biggest problem would be time. That design is excellent, but it

would take time to craft, and I don't think Žaloudek will give us time to prepare after the Princess had escaped. If we don't make it them in time, we will be destroyed."

"Don't worry, we already expected this and took measures to stall the enemy. That will buy us some time."

Eru answered all the questions raised without hesitation. At this moment, Martina said:

"One more point, we might be able to fend off the enemy forces being transferred to the other territories, but their troops already garrisoned in the east can't be overlooked either. If they found out that we are making those sort of things during their patrol, we won't have any excuse then."

Martina's query was very possible. Eru answered her with an exceptionally brilliant smile:

"Don't worry, we took care of most of the enemy in the east during our earlier procurement, and we will continue to do so."

"I-I see..."

Everyone present knew the exploits of the Silver Phoenix Merchants well, and they were even named 'deathgod' by the Žaloudek army, so Eru was definitely not putting on a strong front.

"How about it, aunt? The Silver Phoenix's merchandize are 'safety' and 'combat prowess', let's sign a contract until the country is taken back!"

"...Fu, fufu. I really can't stand you, dummy. Why not then, it's a deal!"

When she saw Emrys making such a bold declaration with a fearless smile, Martina finally regain her usual composure and smiled. The two of them had similar smile, which made their blood relation prominent.

As Emrys and Martina made the decision to sign the contract, an unexpected person halted them from behind:

"Please wait, Young Master. Lady Martina and you are relatives, but this is a matter that will decide the survival of a nation. Since we are merchants, we can't provide aid solely on good will. We have to ask for proper compensation too."

It was Eru who spoke out. Seeing him going off script, Emrys said in a panic:

"Hey, Ernesti, why are you bringing that up all of a sudden!? The merchant thing is just an excuse, we are not..."

"No, don't interrupt for now, Rys. He is right and I can accept that. It is unpleasant to rely on your good will one sidedly."

Martina faced Eru with a firm attitude. For the sake of her late husband and the late king, she had to protect Eleanora and restore the Kingdom. And the Silver Phoenix Merchant was an indispensable force for that. She knew Emrys temperament well, and understood that an organization couldn't act out of good will alone, and work done should be rewarded with adequate remuneration.

She stared at the petite youth before her, who led a strange and powerful organization called the Silver Phoenix Merchants (Knights). He had the appearance of a young child, but was able to infiltrate the city with a weirdly shaped Silhouette Knight and wrecked havoc. She didn't dare to underestimate this youth. Eru met her strong gaze and said slowly:

"The compensation we would like are Silhouette Knights. From now on, we want the rights to all enemy Silhouette Knights defeated by us."

"...Ah? That's all?"

"Yes, that's the only condition."

Martina considered the pros and cons quickly in her heart. She had to rely on their strength for now, but her army would become the main forces sooner or later. Before that happens, there wouldn't be any losses to her if they took the defeated enemy machines as remuneration. At the root of all this, just thinking about the adequate reward for reclaiming the territories of a kingdom would be stupefying enough, and Eru's request was trivial in comparison.

"Alright, if that is all you need, then it wouldn't be a problem. We have no objections."

She had her suspicions, but still nodded in agreement. The relieved Martina didn't realized that Emrys who was protesting loudly had shut his mouth.

"Alright then! It's a deal. We are in agreement then... I will utterly

destroy all the enemies, and turned them all into my property!”

Eru also nodded, a vicious killing intent mixed into his dreamy smile. At this moment, Emrys who had traveled with him and gradually understood Eru’s character felt a chill, and understood one thing—

He didn’t say it is the Silver Phoenix Merchant’s property, but his property... There’s no mistake, Ernesti intend to take every single enemy machine out, and claim it all for himself!!

He wanted to stop him, but dismissed that thought after deliberating further. It wouldn’t matter as long as the enemy was defeated. Eru and his aunt agreed on this point too, so it would be fine—

And so, the remnants of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom army signed a contract with the Silver Phoenix Merchants, and the war became even more unpredictable.

“A loser should just act like a loser and obey their orders. How dare they make us waste so much effort.”

The black group advanced along the Pan-Kucher road, every step they took shaking the paved stones under their feet. The intimidating group of black contrasted with their surroundings. They were the Black Skull Knights despatched from the northern region of Kuscheperca, and included 40 Tyrants and 20 conscripted Resvants, forming a battalion.

“Battalion commander, it would be better to not speak of this. Be wary of the Silhouette Knight’s broadcast system receiving unnecessary information.”

His deputy walked to the side of the Tyrant the commander was piloting, and advised him quietly. A few days ago, they received a written order, which was signed off by both Princess Catalina and Prince Cristóbal. It meant that the importance of the document was equivalent to a decree, and took the highest priority on the field. Their orders were to capture the Kuscheperca royals that escaped, and to destroy any resistance forces. News of the royals escaping was a top secret, and only the battalion commander and his deputy knew about this. The other knights were only told they were here to put down the unrest in the east. That was only natural, after all, the royals escaped— or rather, they were kidnapped— which would lower the morale of the Žaloudek army drastically. It would also boost the will of the Kuscheperca remnants and invite unnecessary trouble.

“I get it, don’t need to nag... But really, who is the one who let that wench escape? And we, the glorious Black Skull Knights have to come clean up the mess...”

The battalion commander shooed his deputy away and turned off his broadcast. The Black Skull Knights was an exceptionally elite group in the Žaloudek army, and was given more important missions than other knight corps. So when they were tasked to clean up some other people’s mess, they weren’t too happy about it. A short moment later, the battalion arrived at a fort located next to the road. This fort served as a stronghold of sorts, but was abandoned due to the threat from Levitate Ships. Keeping their guard up, the battalion entered the deserted fort.

"It is completely abandoned, and nothing is left behind. Never mind, we will perform maintenance on the Black Knights after meeting the supply team. Deploy the sentries! We will be staying

here temporarily.”

After the commander gave his orders, the troops started moving. As it was abandoned without a fight, there were no signs of damage to the fort, and could be utilized immediately. The battalion was getting tired from their long march to the south, and decided to have a good rest to perform maintenance with the facilities here.

After the arrival of the main forces, the supply unit also moved into the fort. They were well supplied and there was a full range of facilities inside the fort. With things going well, they didn't have any worries and it was only natural for them to let down their guard. They didn't have any doubts and focus on resting up.

— The incident happened at midnight, the second day after they moved into the fort.

Sentries patrolled on top of the walls that surrounded the fort. Despite their assigned task, the sentries were unfocused, and it was clear they were just going through the motions. Light from oil lamps flickered onto the wall as they walked absent mindedly. Suddenly, the light was gone. The lights that were lit all over the walls were engulfed by darkness one by one.

In place of them, shadows appeared on the walls. Collapsed at their feet were the corpses of the sentries, and the oil lamp knocked down onto the floor revealed their true identity. Full plated armour that were 2.5m tall— the Silhouette Gear Shadowlad.

The Shadowlads surveyed the inside of the fort from the walls. As the fort belonged originally to the Kuscheperca army, they had already investigated its internal structure beforehand. After watching cautiously, they grasped the situation of the Žaloudek army. With a short exchange of hand gestures, they continued with

their operation.

In the middle of the night, an earth shattering explosion woke the Žaloudek army.

“W-What is that ruckus!?”

The battalion commander who was sleeping inside a room charged out with his sword, and asked those around him loudly. One subordinate ran to him and answered:

“Reporting! I-It’s an enemy attack! The enemy set fire to the fort!”

“What did you say!? What are the sentries doing!?... No, leave that for later. Send men to put out the fire. The others are to engage the enemy, don’t let them leave this place alive!!”

The battalion commander had an ominous feeling when he saw his subordinates stuttering, and pushed them to take action.

“B-But... The enemy are wearing strange equipment like a mini Silhouette Knight, and human soldiers are no match for them! And they scaled the walls in an instant, and had already escaped outside.”

“How is that possible, what are those things!?... Damn it! Send my orders to the pilots, tell them to pursue in their Silhouette Knight! We can’t let them off so easily!”

The pilots took action after receiving their orders. Several Tyrants and Resvants stood up, and took off to chase the attackers. The

attackers escaped into the forest on the side of the road, and moved in the dense vegetation, which was a difficult terrain for the Silhouette Knight. This worked to the Silhouette Gears; advantage. However, the forest that was dim in the day was pitch dark at night. No matter how fast the attackers try to escape, there was still a limit.

The Tyrants deployed their back weapons and fired at the forest. The ensuing explosive flames exposed the Silhouette Gears that were hidden in the dark. The enraged Silhouette Knights started chasing intensely. Even though Silhouette Gears could run faster than horses, it was still slower than Silhouette Knights and the gap between them closed gradually. During this time, the Tyrants kept shooting with their back weapons. They couldn't score direct hits because the trees were in their way, but the fire helped them stay on target. The Silhouette Knights hastened their pace.

— But they didn't know that the pilot under the armour of the Shadowlad was smiling deviously.

The Shadowlad dodged randomly. When they reached a certain point, they lowered their stance and passed under something that was intertwined between the trees. One of the Tyrants was in hot pursuit, its eyes fixated on where the Silhouette Gears were going and not on the trap by its feet. Immediately after that, its feet tangled on something and it fell down hard. With no time to brace itself, its face planted onto the ground directly. It crushed its armour and slid quite a distance from its inertia.

The Silhouette Knights behind did an emergency brake, but it was too late. Several machines couldn't react in time and was tripped by the trap, falling into a heap.

“What's going on, there seem to be something... T-They tied steel cables!?”

“Damn thieves! Setting a trap in the forest!”

Visibility was already poor as it was night, and the Silhouette Knights were inside a forest that was hard to maneuver in, so it was virtually impossible to notice such stealthy traps. In the meantime, the Silhouette Gears gradually disappeared from their sights. There would be traps ahead even if they continue their pursuit. It was impossible to catch up to the target if they had to watch out for traps too, and their angry curses echoed throughout the forest in the night.

“T-That concludes the details of how the thieves escaped...”

The Silhouette Knight team reported to the battalion commander after returning to the fort. The commander’s face twisted from anger and he lashed out:

“Damn thieves! They are well prepared... Just whose forces are they from!? Forget it, how’s the fire extinguishing going?”

“Sir, we let the Silhouette Knights help in putting out the fire too, but the enemy seemed to have used demon beast oil. The fire is still out of control.”

Demon beast oil was a type of oil extracted from a demon beast found in the east of Aubigne. Once ignited, it was difficult to put out, a common tool used in sabotage missions.

“Damn it... The more I hear about them, the more disgusted I get. What items got burned?”

“Sir, according to reports, we lost a portion of our food supply, and

the enemy mainly targeted the Silhouette Knight's spare parts."

When he heard that, the battalion commander finally reached his limits, and was on the verge of venting it out on the surrounding. But his subordinates were before him, so he restrained himself. Losing food supply was serious, but the loss of spare parts were even worse. The Black Knights might be formidable in battle, but their heavy armour was a huge burden on their legs. They were tough enough to hold their own weight, but to bring out their full potential, frequent maintenance of their legs was a necessity. The part that would run into problems the most was the Crystal Tissue. The Žaloudek's bulk of Silhouette Knights were Tyrants which use Strand Crystal Tissue. And amongst the destroyed supplies were a large number of Strand Crystal Tissue spare parts.

"How did this happen, this will seriously delay us...! This is a direct order from His Highness, we can't give up so easily!"

The battalion commander and his deputy looked at each other. The expedition force wouldn't receive frequent resupply, and they had to make do with the resources they have on hand for quite a long period of time.

"There's nothing we can do about that. Oh right, the conscripted Resvants have normal Crystal Tissues, so modify them for our use. We need to inform the Knightsmith early, so they can prepare the Strand Crystal Tissue early."

The problem was that normal Crystal Tissues couldn't be used on the Tyrants directly, and needed to be modified into the form of strands.

As they had to make haphazard adjustment, the maintenance team had the additional task of crafting Strand Crystal Tissues on top of

their original duties, and their burden during their journey increased.

The night raids were mainly aimed at their resources, but losses in terms of manpower and combat readiness were minimal. And so, the Žaloudek army resumed their march after just a short delay. And as expected, their enemy wasn't satisfied with just sabotaging them once.

The second incident happened when they were advancing along the road.

A sudden rain of arrows as if they were launched from a siege weapon was fired onto the Žaloudek forces from the forest. The Silhouette Knights defended immediately, but the powerful bolts were aimed at the workhorses of the supply unit, which caught the soldiers in the vicinity too. The attackers ignored the counter attacks by the incensed Silhouette Knights, and they fled without even checking the effectiveness of their assault.

Once again, steel cables were laid carefully in the forest, forcing the Silhouette Knights to abandon their pursuit.

As their horses were killed, they had to slow their pace. They maintain a state of high alert after the repeated attacks, which slowed their speed even further. Their losses were no longer negligible, and the Žaloudek army didn't think the attacks would be ending. The unit was determined to 'get them back next time', but the attackers already switched targets to another unit.

They targeted the supply unit instead. When the supply unit was still in northern Kuscheperca which should be under the control of Žaloudek Kingdom and relaxed their vigilance, they suffered heavy losses from an unexpected fire attack.

"Tch, there is no end to this, those bastards! Their objective is the supply line huh. We already suppressed them with our Levitate Ships, but it looks like there are still fellows with guts out there."

The reason their supply lines had been smooth in the past was thanks to the Levitate Ships. It was easy to spot a Silhouette Knight's movement from the air, and in fact there were actually several sneak attacks by the old Kuscheperca army, but trying to break through Žaloudek Kingdom's forces was no different from suicide.

In contrast, these attackers didn't use Silhouette Knights, but opt for mini Silhouette Knights machine instead. It would be difficult to track them from the air since they use the forest to hide themselves.

While the Žaloudek army was at a loss, the supply team was attacked several more times. The only things they could do were assign more escorts to the supply team, which reduced the number of attacks, but slowed the supply speed.

The stagnation in supply had more serious repercussion than they thought, and the advancing Black Skull Knights gradually fell into a state of supply shortage. Silhouette Knights were weapons that consume a large amount of resource, even more so for the Black Knights with their huge bodies. There was a limit to how far they could go with the supplies they had on hand, and would just increase the burden on the maintenance team traveling with the unit.

The proud and confident Žaloudek army that had always overwhelmed the Kuscheperca army one sidedly were becoming tense and hysterical. That slowed their progress even further, and the journey which was supposed to be smooth sailing was filled

with turbulence.

On a knoll some distance away from the path the Black Skull Knights were traversing, a group was watching them.

"... The enemy is becoming more vigilant. It is time to withdraw, we have achieved the effect of stalling their movement."

Nora from the Blue Hawk Knights muttered quietly behind her were several camouflaged Shadowlad, which made it hard to detect from far. Her subordinates waiting at the side nodded in agreement. Nora took part in the activities of the Silver Phoenix Knights, and was familiar with the controls of Silhouette Gears. Her skills were recognized, and she was made the commander of the sabotage team.

All the attacks against the Žaloudek army was her doing. Spies were proficient in disruption and covert operations, and having the Silhouette Gears made them even better.

"The rest would be the job of the Silver Phoenix Knights main forces and the nobles. Let's hurry back to base and prepare for the next mission."

She turned her gaze to the east. To ready themselves for the real fight that was to come, the shadows ran through the forest as swift as the wind.

On the other hand although the Black Skull Knights battalion suffered heavy losses after being attacked several times, they still

reached their next destination. The army wasn't as arrogant as before, and walls which cut off the forest and roads were getting nearer. That was the gates that blocked the way from the north to the east— the Gedeon city fortress.

This city was well known for being the junction between the East West Highway leading to Fremmevira, and the Pan-Kucher road that joins the north with the south. That was why it was surrounded by sturdy walls, a city with strong defenses.

“... All units halt.”

The lack of supplies and exhaustion would make it dangerous for even an elite unit like the Black Skull Knights to carry on marching.

Under such circumstances, it was easy to see how relieved they were to reach a city that could serve as a base. When they were about to reach the gates, the battalion commander issued the orders to stop the advance. When his deputy enquired his commander in confusion, the commander's Tyrant pointed at 'that thing'.

"... Why aren't our flags hanging there? Or rather, whose banners are those?"

The flags on the walls of Gedeon city fortress were fluttering in the wind, the emblem of a Silver Phoenix spreading its wings was on it. The flag was a way to announce the allegiance of one's forces and to differentiate between friends and foes. Since the flags of Žaloudek Kingdom weren't flying here, it could only mean one thing.

"...Fools. They only rescued one little wench, and they are letting it get to their heads!"

The battalion commander utter in rage, and ordered all units to prepare for battle. Since the other party had made their intention to rebel clear, then there was only one thing they should do.

“They are probably getting cocky just because they are hiding in their shells, but that’s useless before the Black Knights! My troops are in high spirits, don’t think we will show any mercy!”

And so, the Black Skull Knights that suffered greatly from various sabotages finally found a way to vent their frustration. The entire army was full of fighting spirit, and was also upset that the stronghold that should be their safe haven had been occupied. They should have been exhausted from the long journey, but their rage made them forget even that as the unit deployed in formation, and advanced with an imposing air.

"Prepare for siege battle! Ready the Battering Rams! Crush those fools!!"

At the forefront of the formation in a horizontal line was Tyrants wielding small Battering Rams. The powerful Tyrant could destroy walls even if they used smaller sized Battering Rams, and so they developed the tactic of letting all the machines wield small Battering Rams to attack the walls.

In the face of the black tide, Gedeon city fortress didn’t show any reaction. After all, the mass produced machines from Kuscheperca was no match for the Black Knights, and this fact had been proven time and again. Therefore, the Kuscheperca didn’t engage the enemy outside the wall, and planned to make use of the wall to defend from the start. This was the usual scene in all the Black Knights earlier skirmishes with the Kuschepercas, so the Black Knights approached the walls without suspecting anything. When

they entered Silhouette Arms attack range, they finally saw the Kuscheperca Silhouette Knights taking position on the walls. The front ranks of the Tyrants paid them no mind, their armour could take several shots from their Silhouette Arms without any problem.

And so, the first to realize that something was wrong was the battalion commander standing by in the back line.

"What is... that? They are shaped differently from the strawman Resvants!"

The Silhouette Knights formed a line on top of the walls of Gedeon city fortress, and the Resvants had a completely different appearance. The machine was surrounded by a thick layer of additional armour, and their 'barrel-like' shape made them look like towers on the walls.

As the battalion commander watched on in surprise, four Silhouette Arms reached out from the back of the mysterious Silhouette Knights and aimed towards the front. They seemed to have harnessed the technology known as back weapons of the Žaloudek Army. Together with the two arms protruding out from the gaps of their armour, each of the Silhouette Knights lined up in a row had a total of six Silhouette Arms. When he understood what he was seeing, an ending that was completely different from what he was expecting flashed across his mind—

"It's not that they are not approaching, they just didn't need to!? Damn it, the Black Knights will..."

He was a step late in his yell, as the Silhouette Knights fired in unison the very next second. Their Silhouette Arms launched a higher volume of projectiles that were also more powerful in a continuous barrage. The ferocious bulletstorm landed on the heads of the Black Knights, and constructed a large wall of fire, attempting to burn the Black Knights along with the ground they

stood on into ash.

Not just that, the catapults inside the fort also used this chance to launch their attacks. The Black Knights were having a hard time dealing with the volley of shots, and the boulders falling from a different angle made things worse. Even with the heavy armour that was the pride of the Tyrants, they needed to defend themselves in order to guard themselves from the boulders, and the invincible rank formation showed gaps for the first time.

The Tyrants didn't just take hits one sidedly, and deployed their back weapons to fight back. Their shots hit Kuscheperca's Silhouette Knight, that just stood still. But its heavy armour protected it, and was unhurt even after several shots. The gulf between their range attack power was clear.

"Damn it, what the hell are they! Their Silhouette Arms can fire consecutive shots!?"

The attacks from the catapults and Silhouette Arms forced the Žaloudek army into a tough situation, and they started feeling that something was amiss. Silhouette Arms were powerful weapons, but it consumes large amount of mana with its usage. If they attacked continuously with Silhouette Arms, their manapool will run dry, forcing them to stop. But they showed no signs of stopping since the start of the battle. It was obvious the enemy was using some sort of gimmick.

"Damn it, they can't win in melee combat, so they don't plan to let us get close from the start? Trivial tricks... Oh no, our losses are mounting. We have to pull back for now! Relay the orders!"

Veins appeared on the forehead of the battalion commander, who roared his orders. Even though the Tyrants wore heavy armour, the

fierce attacks from the enemy were powerful enough to damage it, so the slow Tyrants would need to pay a heavy price before they reach the wall. Their objective here was for a long term invasion campaign, and even ignoring this point, the repeated sneak attacks exhausted them heavily, and they couldn't afford to suffer too much casualties.

For the first time since the Žaloudek army started this war, they suffered a defeat in a siege battle.

When they saw the Black Skull Knights retreat, the Kuscheperca troops moved in a panic on top of Gedeon city fortress' wall.

"The Žaloudek army is retreating! Vido team, ceasefire!"

"We don't know when they will be back. Infantry, use this chance to reload the catapult!"

"Keep your Silhouette Arms deployed. Vido team to maintain current position to deter them, and wait for your manapool to recover!"

The Silhouette Knights in line formation kept their Silhouette Arms raised as their Ether Reactor made intense sound of air intake. These Silhouette Knights with the appearance of barrels were Resvant Vido, machines built according to the blueprint proposed by Ernesti, and distributed by the Silver Phoenix Merchants. Using the mass produced Resvants of the old Kuscheperca army as the base, it was a simple modification with the installation of Back Weapons and Capacity Frames to increase mana storage.

The main component of this modification was the additional armour that covered the entire machine, the 'Wall Robe'. Not only

did it improve defenses, it was made entirely from Capacity Frame. With this, a Resvant could store more mana than normal. The huge amount of mana storage and multiple guns made it a machine that specialized in ranged attacks. Unfortunately, the hasty modification made its flaw really obvious. The weight of the Wall Robe also rendered the machine virtually immobile, turning it into a machine used exclusively for fort defense. But even such a failure of a machine was enough to intimidate the Žaloudek army that wasn't aware of the truth.

“Look... Those Žaloudek bastards have left the road! We defended the city successfully! We won!”

Seeing the Black Skull Knights retreat from the walls, there was first a commotion amongst the soldiers, which finally erupted into cheers.

In the group of rowdy soldiers, several of the commanders appraised the situation calmly.

“We finally won a battle. But we only chased them off once. Their damage is minimal, and will definitely be back. If we can keep them on their toes and stay away for now, that would be great.”

The Resvant Vidos that lacked mobility were well suited for base defense, but on the other hand, they were poor for offensive actions. The threat of the Žaloudek army was far from over, but they still immersed themselves in the victory they won for the time being.

News of the victory at Gedeon city fortress spread all over the

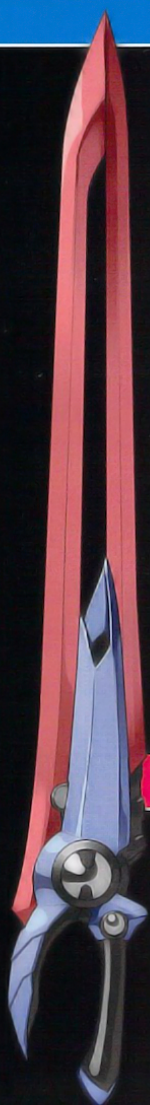
nation. For the resistance movement that had been growing since the rescue of Eleanora, that was a great morale boost.

Only the Silver Phoenix Knights could fight the Žaloudek army on even grounds in the past, and the battles they won weren't really a true victory for the Kuschepercas. With the addition of the new weapon Resvant Vido the nobles of old Kuscheperca also took to the battlefield. The revolt of the minor nobles shook the influence of Žaloudek army's eastern governance house, and reverted the east back into a field of battle.

On top of that, the defensive lines set up by the Resvant Vidos also stopped the advance of the Black Skull Knights in the south that were heading to the east. The continuous attack of the Silhouette Gears before that also dealt higher than expected damage to the Žaloudek army. Their plans had been disrupted, and they were forced to amend their timetable.

Žaloudek originally planned to put down the unrest in the east in short order, but had to regroup because their plans were thrown into disarray. As for the remnant army of old Kuscheperca, their new weapon Resvant Vido lacked mobility. And so, the battlefield formed a dangerous balance, and the Western Grand Storm entered a short period of calm.

C.E. 1281, It was almost autumn and about half a year had passed since the Žaloudek Kingdom declared war. This war was about to enter a new chapter.



Pilot / Ernesti Echevarria

spec

Height / 11.2m

Weight / 21.6t

Equipment / Sword Cannon, Halberd, Rahu Fist, Magius Jet Thrusters

explanation

Personal Machine of the Silver Phoenix Knight Commander Ernesti, which doubles as the command machine of the Knight Corp. As its design stemmed from Eru who had memories of his past life as a Japanese, it was the only machine in this world with a design based on a foreign culture -- the Armoured Samurai. At the same time, it had multiple Ether Reactors, with the mid sized Ether Reactor 'Queen's Coronet' installed in its abdomen, and the large Ether Reactor 'Behemoth's Heart' on its back. The enormous power output supports the usage of all the Magius Jet Thrusters on the machine, resulting in extreme mobility. On the other hand, nobody aside from the Eru, who was a living controller, could control it. It possess the best combat capabilities, and was the most flawed machine in history at the same time.

Sword Cannon

explanation

It had the appearance of a large thick sword, and is the personal equipment of Ikaruga. Silver plates with Emblem Graft were hidden inside, so aside from using it as a sword, it also doubles as a Silhouette Arms. In order to use fragile Silhouette Arms as a melee weapon, Emblem Graft to harden it was also used. In the end, it became an inefficient weapon that would expand huge amount of mana by just swinging the sword.

Chapter 34: The Worries of the Princess

At the easternmost part of old Kuscheperca Kingdom's eastern territories, there was a city called Missillier.

From the workshops built all over the city, one could see the dramatic change that happened to this city recently.

In the workshop which runs through the day and night, a heat wave unlike that of pure crafting works lingered in the air. The heat stemmed from a machine that kept moving all over the place. The machine used purely for crafting was 2.5m tall, and its crude appearance wasn't like the armour worn by human. Powered by the mana of the pilot, it used Strand Crystal Tissue to move its limbs—This machine was the Silhouette Gear, Motor Rad. Most of the knightsmith were working using Motor Rad.

“Hey! You there! There's a fellow who exhausted his mana, bring him out to rest! No matter how busy it is, don't push yourself, it will be even more problematic if you collapse!... It's fine to start slow, you will get used to it in time no matter how much you detest it!”

A loud roar pierced through the noise that filled the workshop, and was answered by acknowledgement that came from all sides. If they ignored the Kuscheperca knightsmith who had not gotten used to the Silhouette Gears, they would reach their limits really quickly.

The one who yelled earlier happened to have found a knightsmith who was pushing himself too much while doing his rounds, and gave his advice. The surprising thing was, he could continually do crafting works while he walked around to supervise others. Although he was working with a Silhouette Gear like others, on

closer inspection, his machine was obviously different from others.

It had fast yet delicate hands used for precision works, and powerful arms for heavy lifting, which totals into four arms. It had the default 'steel fencing' installed to protect the pilot, but additional shelves of tools were built on top of it, while crates with screws and metal plates were tied to its legs. Probably to support the heavy weight of the machine, its legs were thicker than usual to ensure stability. The person who was operating this stout four-armed machine was working at extraordinary speed, and was an amazing sight to behold.

And that man was the Chief Knightsmith of the Silver Phoenix Knights— the Boss, David Hepken in his majestic personal Silhouette Gear 'Mobile Workshop'.

In Fremmevira Kingdom, the Silver Phoenix Knights had the highest ration of knightsmith that uses Silhouette Gears. They all use Motor Beat directly in the beginning, but in pursuit of better efficiency, they started modifying their own Silhouette Gears later. And among them, the Dwarves Fist which the Boss claimed to have 'most items needed in a workshop' was the most prominent. Its mechanical crane arm could easily lift large spare parts that couldn't be handled by humans and hold it in place, making it a breeze to work on; the five fingers that was as nimble as those on Shadowlads replicated the fine techniques of the Dwarves. Its powerful strength was immensely helpful for working on steel parts.

On top of that, it was equipped with Magius Weld Gun for hot welding. Aside from crafting that required large forges, everything from metal sculpting to assembly could be done by this machine alone. It was that ridiculous a thing.

"Boss—! Can you spare me some time—!?"

As the Boss deftly used the four arms to work, a voice pierced through the noisy workshop and halted him.

"Oh, isn't that Ernesti? Hold on, let me finish up here!!"

The Boss gave some instructions to the people around him, completed his task at hand, then walked out of the workshop with heavy strides. The one who called for him— Eru observed the working knightsmith intriguingly as he waited for the Boss.

"Hmm, looks like the introduction of Motor Beat is going smoothly."

"Hmm, they say they had never seen such a thing before and looked unwilling, but they turned docile after I show a bit of what Mobile Workshop could do. Anyway, we are urging them to make Silhouette Gears quickly and to get used to them fast. It is easy to make the machine for work purposes, so they should be able assemble the numbers in no time."

"I did intimidate them a little."— the Boss said, and Eru nodded satisfactorily. It was much quicker to mass produce Silhouette Gears than Silhouette Knights, and equip the entire team. The plan was to turn the tables for the remnants of the old Kuscheperca army by introducing Silhouette Gears and mass producing them.

"There doesn't seem to be any problem with the progress, we made some headway into the next phase of the project. First is..."

"Oh, I thought you would mention that. I just got the detailed design plans for the Resvants."

When he saw the Boss waving a stack of paper, Eru said with a wry smile:

“As expected of the Boss, you are really quick.”

“Thank you for the compliment. We’ve known each other for quite some time after all. Even though I know nuts about fighting, I could tell that the Resvants can’t put up a good fight without some modification. At best, it is just a bit stronger than our Karrdator.”

Eru took the plans proffered by the Boss and nodded in agreement:

“That’s right, a new machine with adequate performance still need to be designed, and there isn’t much time to do so. I want to use the designs for Karrdatolle directly.”

“... That’s still a ‘specialty’ of our country right? Even if they are our allied nation, we can’t leak confidential information so easily correct?”

"Actually I got permission from Old Master(the King), so I can do as I please by my own judgement.”

“Maybe Old Master gave permission to the wrong person...”

The Boss controlled Mobile Workshop nimbly to stroke his beard and sighed deeply.

“I’m not really using that directly, I’m just referencing the design of the Karrdatolle as the foundation to overhaul the Resvants. But

from the current situation, the time limitation plays a major factor, I don't know if we can afford to take it easy."

"Sigh, this is a big problem. If I don't push the knightsmith here hard, we will probably be working through the night again."

The Boss didn't seem troubled at all, and even clasped his fist with his hand while smiling with his warface. At his core, he was just another hopeless weirdo who likes to fiddle with machines.

"One more thing, I would like to ask you to make the weapon 'we need to use'."

"Hold back a little, this tasklist is already the most difficult one in recent times. What are you talking about?"

"We are more or less prepared to fight against Silhouette Knights, but there are other problems. We still have to deal with those Levitate Ships, so I want to prepare at least one type of 'anti-air weapon'."

What Eru said surprised the Boss. Because he heard that Eru and Ikaruga almost took down a Levitate Ship on the way back after rescuing the Kuscheperca royals.

"Do you and Ikaruga need such a thing?"

"No, this is for everyone aside from me and Ikaruga. Frankly speaking, Di-Senpai felt it was a pity that the Levitate Ship got away last time. It just need to hit the ships a little. Letting them know that 'the air isn't a safe place' would be a good way of keeping them in check."

After hearing Eru's explanation, the Boss acknowledged and agreed to the job. Despite how competent he was, he couldn't think of any weapon that could deal with a ship flying in the sky. However, it was easy for Eru who had made so many strange equipment to invent something like that. Anyway, turning these ideas into reality was his job, and he had never thought of refuting that point.

"... We will just need time now. Will we finish the new machines and anti air weapons first, or will the opponent complete their preparations and attack before us? Come, let's sprint hard everyone. Whether they will catch up to us, or we will shake them off, the real battle (festival) is coming. Isn't that worth waiting for?" After finding a definite goal, a satisfied smile appeared on Eru's cute face. But in the Boss' eyes, that was a hellish smile of the devil.

Missillier's workshop zone gradually expanded. In the city center nearby, there was a mansion where the escaped Kuscheperca royals were lodging in. It used to belong to a certain merchant, but was abandoned because he got caught in the flames of war, and was seized and used by the nobles. The previous owner was doing really well, and its scale was rather grand for a rural province. Aside from the royals, the Silver Phoenix Merchants that was using this city as its base.

Martina watched the bustling city scene outside the window and said with a sigh:

"Seeing how lively they are, I almost forgot that the Kuscheperca had already fallen."

The people traversing the streets were full of life, and didn't have any sign of sadness that their kingdom had fallen. Fueling their movements were the common consensus of the citizens and soldiers that they were working to take back their nation.

"In order to respond to their efforts, we still have an important problem to resolve. Which is the vanguard of this resistance plan, the guide post who would lead the way to the restoration of Kuscheperca Kingdom... the monarch."

Her words made Emrys who was sipping tea at the same table lift his head and ask:

"So Ellie will be the Queen? That is true by her birthright, but forgive me for being blunt, I don't think she can handle the heavy burden of leading a country. No, in the first place, she can't lead troops into battle."

"... I know that too, but it is exactly because this is a time like this, that we have to do this the proper way, Rys."

Eleonora was the only daughter of the late King Aukusti , and was already 16 years old, an adult. According to the customs of this period, she was recognized as first in the line of succession. Going about it properly, she was definitely the correct choice— and this was a headache for Martina.

"That might be so, but more importantly, how is Ellie? Are her wounds healed?"

"She isn't doing too well. No, she is recovering fine, but she is shutting herself in her room."

When she heard Emrys' question, Isadora who was sitting at the side said as she shook her head. Eleonora who already lacked physical endurance was frail in both mind and body during her captivity in Lacepede Castle, and had been bedridden ever since she escaped here. She got better as time went by, but she was still unwilling to come out from her room.

"Tch! Aunt, I don't agree with this. Even though this is tradition, sending a weak girl to the frontlines is not something a sane man would do!"

"No matter what, that is the obligation of the royals and those who inherit the bloodline of the king. There are times we will need to suppress our own emotions, and stand up for the sake of the people and state. I have to let Eleonora... understand this."

Martina stopped Emrys who was about to speak again. She could empathize with Eleonora— caught in a war, losing her father and the heavy burden of being a princess was crushing her, confining her to her room. When he saw Martina's troubled face, Emrys swallowed the words he wanted to speak. Martina expressed her determination to Emrys who still couldn't accept this:

"Rys, being a princess is too great a burden for that child, I can understand that. But a leader in chaotic times... have to stand before the masses, and will only be recognized by the people as the heir to the throne when she leads them to victory. This is the only way for that child to be Queen...!"

Martina lowered her gaze. This was the only duty the king entrusted to her, or a parting gift of sorts. The complicated relationship between king and country, and the troubling influence of blood relations could be seen. And she wasn't the only one with this opinion. After escaping her, the nobles also viewed the

existence of the princess as a banner. Willing or not, people around Eleonora will not just watch idly by.

“Aunt... Even so, this will be a little, no a big burden on Ellie. Will things go so smoothly?”

“I won’t let her shoulder all this alone of course. My plan is for us to help her out with the actual administration.”

A suffocating silence filled the room. In the end, Emrys scratched his head and sighed. He might be from another nation, but he was still a member of a royal family. He also understood what she was saying, and even though he couldn’t accept it, he could only agree to this.

"Aunt, you are serious... Alright, sorry for blabbering so much, but what are you going to do? She won’t even leave her room, much less lead everyone?”

“That’s true. We also tried all means to convince her, but to be honest, it doesn’t look good. If possible... I would like to request the aid of the Silver Phoenix Merchants to cheer that child up.”

And finally, a bold and fearless expression returned to Emrys’ face

“Leave it to us!”

This was the workshop used by the Silver Phoenix Knights. Emrys surveyed his comrades that gathered around him, and said in a volume loud enough for everyone to hear:

“And that is why, I would like to borrow your strength! Help Ellie gain back her courage. Tell her that we are here for her, and there is no need to worry. Something like that!”

After accepting Martina’s request, he immediately explained the situation to the Silver Phoenix Merchants and asked for their aid. They felt troubled about taking on the momentous task of convincing the princess, but surprises like these were normal for the Silver Phoenix Merchants. They focused on the task and started an earnest discussion:

“We should tell her the glorious exploits of 2nd Company in detail...”

“No, we knightsmiths should introduce the wonderful capabilities of the new model machine to Her Highness...”

“But that’s the princess? Will she understand?”

Several good ideas came up during their debate, but there wasn’t any specific proposal that looked great. After the dialogue died down, Eru who had been listening quietly said:

“Well then, we could tell Her Highness the achievements of the Silver Phoenix Knights. But she should have already heard that. She might not come out after hearing that, so we should prepare another topic.”

As he spoke, Eru tidied his thoughts quickly:

“... Yes, we should gather some intel. Young Master studied in this

country in the past right? Have you heard about what the Princess interests are?”

Emrys frowned and crossed his arms at this question and said:

“What she would be interested in... That stumped me. To be honest, I spent most of my time with aunt and didn’t speak much with Ellie. Ugh... Oh right! If Isadora is in a bad mood, she will feel better if I practice swordsmanship with her. Very well, I will take Ellie for a spin in Gordesleo, she will become cheerful in no time!”

“Rejected. Yup, I shouldn’t have asked Young Master. Let’s change our approach. The opinion of girls her age is also important, so any ideas, Ady?”

“We just need to cheer up the princess right? Leave it to me! Hufufu, the princess is cute and small just like Eru. I already want to talk to her, and give her a hug...”

“No, rejected. This idea is terrible.”

Even Eru felt like retorting— That is the way to cheer yourself up! But he dismissed the idea in the end. Chid who was sitting beside Ady asked Eru:

“Do you have any ideas, Eru?”

“... If it’s a Silhouette Knight or Silhouette Gear, I can get the gist on where the problem lies and how to repair it.”

“These people won’t do, all of them are useless...”

Seeing how fruitless the situation was, Chid couldn't help looking into the sky and sigh. Ady who was beside him smacked her fist into her palm and said:

"Then Chid, you...! That's right! Didn't you swore fealty to Her Highness? Now is your chance to show your cool side!"

Everyone present turned their gaze onto Chid at this moment. Chid even felt physical pressure from this, and took a few steps back.

"Eh! Why are you bringing this up now!? ...E-Erm, listen to me everyone, that... although that is true..."

As he tried to fudge over it with a laugh, his arm was grabbed by someone. Chid turned his head with a start, and saw Eru who was smiling gently before him.

"I see... Then it is decided. This is the Knight Commander's orders, you have to cheer the Princess up, Chid."

"Hey, that's too sly...! Ahh, alright, I get it! Damn it, don't blame me if it ends badly!!"

After knowing he couldn't escape, Chid yelled in resignation. He stepped onto the arduous battlefield alone.

Shortly after this, Chid followed Isadora from the mansion used as the base of the Silver Phoenix Knights, and headed down the corridor leading to Princess Eleonora's room.

"Think, think damn it... If it is Eru, he will feel better by throwing

him into a workshop; Ady will cheer up if Eru is with her... Ah damn it, those two are useless as reference!!”

Chid was incredibly frail and was mumbling rubbish. He was wracking his brain because of the heavy responsibility entrusted to him, which made Isadora who was watching beside him very worried. That might be so, he was still the person recommended by the Silver Phoenix Knights, and was the one who rescued Eleonora from Lacepede Castle, so she could only leave it to him. Both of them harboured their own worries and reached the Princess’ quarters very quickly.

“We are here. Are you ready?”

“... The guys from my Knight Corps are too optimistic. I don’t recall ever encouraging anyone before... Hmm? Ah, no problem, I will do my best.”

His response suggested the contrary, but Isadora ignored that and knocked the door. After explaining her intention to visit, she waited for the maids in the living room to receive her as usual.

The quarters where the Princess resided had two rooms. Maids who doubled as guards waited in the outer room, while the Princess’ chambers was the room further in.

As they waited for the Princess to groom herself, the curious gazes of the maids stabbed onto the youth brought by Isadora like needles. It was rare to see someone other than a noble visiting after all. From his facial features, he appeared to be similar in age to the Princess. He had a well proportioned and lean body, wearing the typical attire of pilot with his leather light armour. The most intriguing thing was his aura of being forced into a corner.

“Welcome Isadora. So today too.... Hmm? E-Erm, Mr Archid...”

Princess Eleonora appeared very quickly, and showed a surprised expression when she saw the person besides Isadora. In her never changing shut-in lifestyle, the only thing that changed was Isadora’s daily visits and chats. As someone of the same gender and age, Isadora was the family she was most open to.

But recently, under the instructions of her mother, Isadora mentioned more frequently about Eleonora becoming Queen, so Eleonora found this time gradually becoming hard to relax. Even so, she still welcomed Isadora’s visits.

Standing before Eleonora who was at a loss because of this unexpected meeting, Chid bowed stiffly. This was their first meeting after escaping to Missillier. Back then, they met inside the dim Lacepede Castle, but this time, it was under the bright sunlight. Chid raised his head with a complicated expression, his wavering gaze staring at mid air. After escaping imprisonment, the recuperating Eleonora had gradually recovered her beauty as the flower of Kuscheperca. Unrelated to the how bright the room was, the youth found the scene before him to be too brilliant for his eyes.

Eleonora didn’t understand what he was troubled about, and cast a confused gaze to Isadora quizzically. Isadora shrugged unhappily and said:

“You can’t just shut yourself in here. You are the daughter of King Aukusti, and has the obligation to understand the situation this nation is in. That’s why we picked someone to come here and convince you.”

Isadora sat down forcefully, and signalled Chid to sit down too.

Chid braced himself mentally, then walked to a chair like a malfunctioning Silhouette Knight. Seeing Isadora's being so forceful made Eleonora turn gloomy.

"Why? Isadora... I already told you plenty of times, I really can't take up the heavy burden of being a kingdom's monarch..."

"That's not true, the aristocrats are preparing to strike back against the Žaloudeks right now. That's because you— the inheritor of the royal bloodline has returned, and leading them is your obligation as a royal."

Royal bloodline— Isadora's words stirred a certain memory in Eleonora's head.

—The face of the uncouth man who declared that he would exploit the 'blood of the Royal Kuscheperca' flowing in her veins. He wasn't saying it to another human being, and was just disposing of a useless tool, a proclamation of her death. She felt a sudden chill and slowly hugged herself.

"Will it be... a war again? Can we really win?"

Mistaking that Eleonora said that because she lacked confidence, Isadora expanded on the topic:

"Don't worry Eleonora, we are also getting stronger, and had won a few battles with the new power we got, so..."

The explanation would be the mission of the Silver Phoenix Merchant member— Chid's task. But when Isadora turned back and looked, Chid was just listening seriously and kept quiet.

“There were many knights in the capital back then, but not only my father, the knights also...! Even if we have a chance of winning, no, no matter what, people will die and blood will be shed if there is war. The next time might be aunt or you, even Rys-Nii might not be able to escape...”

Fear appeared clearly on Eleonora’s face. She lowered her head and refused to say anymore. Isadora reached out her hand troublingly—

“... Princess Eleonora.”

Before that, Eleonora’s knight interjected calmly. Eleonora raised her head with eyes seeking for something to rely on.

“I agree with you wholeheartedly that it will be best if no one sacrificed their lives. But the problem is, if we don’t fight or resist, the problem won’t be solved. When such a situation arises, we knights will pick up our swords.”

Chid looked at Eleonora straight in her eyes. Although he revealed a bit of his true nature and his tone was obviously cruder, no one admonished him, probably because they were awed by his aura.

“If they come at us with swords, we should counter with blades. We should face the challenge bravely with indomitable will. Whether our efforts will bear fruit is another matter.”

“Even if... there are sacrifices, we have to steel ourselves for it. Is that what you want to say...?”

In Eleonora's entire life, no one had spoken so frankly to her before. Complicated feelings welled up, and she looked up at Chid with tears in her eyes and said:

“What should I do if... you fall in battle? Even my father who told me not to worry, and said he will protect me... just like that...!!”

Her sadness drowned out her words and she hid her face in her palms. Isadora just watched over her quietly, while Chid scratched his head troublingly.

Not just him, all the knights of Fremmevira Kingdom won't hesitate to fight, and will strive for a quick and decisive resolution. This was the influence of his environment, and the reason why all the citizens had the tendency of not hesitating. For a princess from another nation who was raised in a tender environment, this was probably hard to imagine.

Was it a fluke? Because he didn't understand the other party completely, Chid successfully found the biggest reason of unease the Princess had. Chid calmed himself slightly, then framed his words carefully:

“That means... Erm, you only think so because you don't know.”

In the end, Chid ignored the gloomy air in the room and said resolutely:

“Princess Eleonora, let's go outside!!”

He said out of nowhere. Not just Eleonora, even Isadora raised her head and looked at him with a face of shock.

“If you just stay in this room, you won’t be able to see how the country actually is, and if we really can fight. You might hate war, but I hope you can make your judgement after seeing it and understanding it with your own eyes. So let’s go and see... how this country is like!”

To him, this was the obvious conclusion. Unless there was a need to make a snap decision, collating intel would be the basics of tactics. Leaving that aside, Chid was also a man of action, and he extended his hand to Eleonora to show his sincerity.

She looked blankly at the hand reaching out for her, this was the second time he offered her his hand. The first was when he took her away from the prison of stone, and the second time, he wanted to whisk her away from the prison of her heart. What both had in common was that she would be liberated in some way.

She didn’t hesitate too long before deciding to trust him once more. She trust that he wasn’t doing this because of anyone else’s plans or scheme, and purely out of his will to help her as her knight.

And so, escorted by her knight, the Princess took one step into the outside world.

Even Chid himself didn’t know where his spirit came from, and it only lasted until they left the room.

It took all he had to keep from keeling over. He only said all that on the spur of the moment, and now that he thought about it, that was really disrespectful towards a royal. He wanted to hug his head to escape from reality, but there was a more serious problem before that—

“Mr Archid? What is the matter?”

— That he was holding the delicate hand of the Princess. He did that in order to lead her out of the room, but why do they have to hold hands? He felt from the bottom of his heart that— Spirit was a scary thing.

“Ah, oh, it’s fine, I will show you around properly. First...”

As he was turning his head, he saw his sister Ady and childhood friend Eru with their ears to the wall eavesdropping.

".....Ah!"

When their eyes met, Chid was shocked, while the two stopped their movements with a meaningful smile. Their gaze fell on the Chid’s hand that was holding Eleonora’s hand.

“Wut arr chew doching here!”

“Chid, you are speaking in a dialect I’ve never heard of! Eh, calm down. I see, I completely understand Chid. The Princess is so cute after all. Of course you will want to help her!! All boys dream of becoming a knight that will escort a princess!”

“Uwah, what a maddening way of putting it, I’m angry now Ady! And on top of that, it’s frustrating how similar my taste is to yours... Ah, that’s not what I want to say, damn it!!”

Chid couldn’t think of any excuse and Ady made her own conclusion. Eru just looked at the two of them with a smile.

“Don’t worry, I will help too! Gather everyone in the Knight Corps, let the princess see how amazing we are! Fufufu, I am overflowing with drive right now!”



"Uwahhh you are sure reliable... But why do you have to... Ah—damn it..."

Ady who got compromising information on Chid was unusually excited. Chid couldn't be bothered to explain further and just sighed into the heavens.

A soft giggle came from Chid's side. He turned his head with a start and saw Eleonora laughing. The gloomy air about her was gone, although her face was still a bit frail, she seemed livelier and energetic.

"Mr Archid is right, I couldn't see anything by shutting myself in my room. It sure is lively outside."

If Ady wasn't here to tease him, Chid probably would have laughed with her. But right now, he could only squeeze out a stiff smile.

"Come Chid, don't just stand there. As a knight, you have to escort your mistress properly. I will go get everyone."

"That's right, let's go! Ah, it's nice seeing the Princess standing besides Eru... how nice and cute!"

"Ady, you really don't change no matter where you are..."

The group brought Eleonora to visit noisily. Regarding the Silver Phoenix Knights and the new Silhouette Knights, there were too many things they needed to tell her. In the end, they decided to bring Eleonora to the workshop. By the way, Chid was still holding her hand on their way to the workshop.

“Yes, this is wonderful. Ellie has cheered up now!”

After the Princess and her group left, Isadora said to someone who was standing tall before her:

“So you are here too, Rys-Nii. Eavesdropping is a bad habit.”

“Hmm? There’s no way I would eavesdrop! I am just staying put in the next room because I don’t want to disturb their conversation!”

“... You are the only one who can accept such a ridiculous reason...”

The speechless Isadora could only shake her head, but she recovered in no time. The two of them walked briskly to catch up with the Princess.

イカルガ Ikaruga



Chapter 35: The Princess' Stratagem

Delvincourt— The city that used to be the capital of Kuscheperca Kingdom was now the central governance house set up by the Žaloudek Kingdom in its Kuscheperca province. They kept the castle, and used it as the residence for the Žaloudek royals.

There were two Žaloudek royals in the castle. One was the commander-in-chief of the invasion army, Second Prince Cristóbal, and the other was his Chief of Administration, the First Princess Catalina.

Catalina was seated in a corner of the former royal castle while enjoying a fragrant cup of tea elegantly. It wasn't really a tea party, but she got to spend this time at her own leisure. After a while, she asked the only other participant:

“Would you like a cup too? This is imported from our home nation. The tea here is nice too, but this familiar fragrance is more calming.”

“No need, there's no meaning in making a fuss over someone like me.”

A woman appeared on the opposite side of the table suddenly, she was Kerhild Hietakangas — Knight Commander of the Copper Fang Knights. She turned down the Princess' suggestion, and sat down without asking for permission. Catalina paid no heed to her insolence and continued sipping her tea. After putting down her tea cup with a clink, Catalina got to the point as if she was just chatting idly:

“The Eastern territories... You should know about what is happening in eastern Kuscheperca, correct?”

“Yes, I know a little. Collating intel is our mission after all.”

As if she had guessed where the conversation was going with just

that sentence, Kerhild answered with an overt attitude of impatience. Maybe she already knew what Catalina was going to ask the moment she was summoned here.

"The remnants of the Kuscheperca committed a new model of Silhouette Knights, which stalled the progress of the unit pursuing the royals. This is unpleasant news, but the bigger problem is the lack of intel from the east. Terrorists were running havoc there earlier, and probably caused a lot of damage."

Catalina's smile locked on to the unmoving and quiet Kerhild, who was like a statue playing the role of a perfect listener.

".....Silver Phoenix Merchants, that's what they call themselves."

"I know."

"Is that so? That's good. They claim to be merchants, but who knows where their allegiance lies. I heard that they gave the Kuscheperca remnants the new Silhouette Knights, and are actually the terrorists."

The uprising of the nobles caused the eastern Žaloudek army to fall into chaos, and their intel reports were greatly hindered. Only by consolidating bits and pieces of intel that leaked out, Catalina could finally grasp the general situation in the eastern territories.

"We can't ignore them, but even if we make a move, the enemy's new model would be rather difficult to deal with. And if this dragged on, Crist won't be able to endure it, and might charge there with his troops."

"Yes... That is really a headache, I know how you feel."

Catalina made a show of sighing, and Kerhild replied half-heartedly.

"And so, I would like to request the Copper Fang Knights to take action by locating the base of the Silver Phoenix Merchants and destroy them. This is just the right job for the Copper Fang Knights

correct?”

Kerhild started weighing the potential threat of the enemy and the combat prowess of the Copper Fang Knights, and concluded that this was extremely dangerous.

Well then, even though she didn't give a direct order, this is still a request by a royal. How should I skirt away from this...

No matter how troubled she was, she couldn't just keep quiet. When she was about to speak, Catalina cut her off with a soft voice:

“If you succeed in this mission... I will give some Kuscheperca land as a reward. And of course, It will be complemented with the adequate noble peerage.”

Kerhild grit her teeth audibly, stiffened her body and her expression became twisted. Her dark gaze wasn't something she should be showing to a royal.

“Are you... serious? Can you guarantee this...?”

“Fufu, are you doubting me? That's only natural. I am generous is rewarding those who meet my expectations, and your eagerness in invading Kuscheperca didn't stemmed from winning war merits, but for the sake of winning your own territory... In order to restore the fallen Hietakangas family, am I right?”

Kerhild didn't answer, and only made a show of straightening her posture.

“Leave it to me, Your Highness Catalina. We the Copper Fang Knights will do all we can to accomplish this task.”

“That's wonderful. I am looking forward...”

Catalina said with satisfaction, but Kerhild was gone in the brief moment when she shifted her gaze

“... She's good. Maybe the fangs of the copper snake will catch the

prey. War aren't fought only on the surface, I wish Crist can learn a little about this."

Catalina called for someone to clear away the cold tea. She had much to do, as the mess in the east had shaken the governance system in the Kuscheperca territory. She would need to suppress the chaos, and wished that her brother would take more interest in statesmanship.

In the old Kuscheperca Kingdom, when they spoke of Silhouette Knights built in a workshop, that usually meant the mass produced model, Resvants. However, what was being built inside the workshop in Missillier city was a completely different machine.

The giant structure on the maintenance platform— the part of the Inner Skeleton that corresponds to the ribs of a human was wide open to accommodate the cockpit, while the heart of the machine — its Ether Reactor and Magius engine was installed into its abdomen. Countless silver cables — Silver Nerves extended out from the exposed heart, and into the grey fiber all over its body—in its Crystal Tissue.

Among these half finished products were some that were almost done. These had the shadows of a Resvant, but its body was one size larger and laid bared its powerful built. From its design that focused on close quarters combat, it was easy to see that it was created to stand against the Black Knights.

In the vicinity of the half finished giants, Knighsmiths in Silhouette Gears bustled around. Using Silhouette Gears that were much more powerful than humans, they carried the heavy spare parts swiftly with ease, proceeding with their work at abnormal speed. With the support of the Silver Phoenix Merchants, the mass produced model of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom had been completely overhauled. Even though the plan was put together hastily, the production line had been going on smoothly. Designing a brand new machine

should be tedious process, but as they could use Karrrdatolle for reference, the design was completed in a very short amount of time. And of course, Eru's enthusiastic participation played a part too.

Strictly speaking, the biggest obstacle of the production was that the Kuscheperca knightsmith wasn't used to the controls. After all, they had to learn skills very different from what they knew to craft the new machine designed by Fremmevira, and they needed time to familiarize themselves with the Silhouette Gear, which was a revolutionary tool. That might be so, but these problems were resolved after they had gotten used to it. In order to be ready for the moment to fight back, they unite as one and work together on the production.

Further in from the new machine crafting zone, there was another group crafting something different. It was Eru, Boss and Batson—members of the Silver Phoenix Knights. The Boss controlled the four armed Silhouette Gear 'Mobile Workshop' and deftly assembled the giant parts it was holding. Batson who was besides him was working hard like an assistant, performing modifications to all sorts of parts.

"Ugh, it is a little big but they aren't any complicated mechanism. It's easy for us to craft this, however, the ones using it will have a hard time. It will be more difficult than using Back Weapons."

"That's true, the pilots probably aren't used to this—"

The Dwarves were assembling a strange contraption that had several rails. It was too big for even Silhouette Knights to wield it by hand.

"Hmm, as expected, that's the problem. The only thing we can change... is the addition of assist function to the Magius Engine. I understand, I will handle that part."

Eru looked at the device. It was a modification of an existing technology, but to accomplish so much in such a short notice made it clear how skilled the Boss was. The Boss was top classed as a knightsmith, but in the realms of constructing scripts in the Magius

Engine, Eru was the best. The efforts of these two played a large hand in all the special equipment created by the Silver Phoenix Knights.

“When you finished the prototype, let me test it for you... Watching the anti-air device being completed day by day, I really feel like having a go with the Levitate Ships. It would be nice if a vessel just happen to fly by for us to test it?”

“... It’s fine if just the Silver Phoenix Knights are around, but the locals will go insane if they heard you.”

The Boss manipulated ‘Mobile Workshop’ nimbly with a look of resignation. Considering the fact that Levitate Ships ravaged this nation badly, this wasn’t something to joke about. Eru lift his index finger to his lips, showing a mischievous smile as he gestured for the others to keep it a secret.

As they continued their work, a guest visited them. It was Ady who was holding a basket of light snacks.

“Thank you for your hard work everyone— are you hungry? Have some snacks!”

“Oh, I want.”

“Sorry for the trouble, I was just feeling a tad hungry. I will help myself then.”

The Boss got down from Mobile Workshop and stretched his shoulders with a crack. Eru who was groaning with his head over the design plans also put down his pen. In the meantime, Batson deftly tidied up the table, allowing Ady to lay out the dishes. The Boss eagerly reached for the food that had been cut into easy to eat portions, then said after taking a bite:

"... This is surprisingly good."

"Big— Boss— Why is it a surprise!? I learned cooking properly from Mom and Aunt Tina! I won’t make something strange!!"

Ady who used this chance to slip into the seat besides Eru turned mad, and the Boss raised his hands in surrender in a hurry:

“Alright alright, that’s my bad. Who is Aunt Tina?”

“That’s my mother. Hmm, you are getting better at cooking, this is nice.”

Eru complimented her as if he was trying to ease the mood, and Ady hugged him with a brilliant smile. Eru just continued eating nonchalantly. The Boss shifted his gaze back and forth between them, and sighed as if to say ‘I don’t get you two at all’.

“... The boy’s mother huh. I have nothing to say if that is fine with you.”

“Nobody loses out anyway, so it’s fine right?”

After seeing Batson took large bites without a care in the world, the Boss shrugs and continued enjoying his meal.

The workshops street of Missillier operated throughout the night. Maybe they were pressed by the operational needs of the workshop, or this was their usual way of working, the trio never stopped working. Deep into the night, Eru suddenly raised his hands and cheered:

“Alright, the script is basically done! Next would be implementing it with the physical object, and adjust it after tests... Wah!”

A pair of hands reached from behind him, and grabbed his arms that were raised high. It goes without saying that they belonged to Eru’s aide, Ady.

“Hey~ Eru, let’s call it a day. I know you are hardworking, but it isn’t good to tire yourself out. This is a good place to stop right?”

“Hmm... That’s true. Let’s rest for today, and start again tomorrow morning.”

Be it fighting battles or crafting equipment, if Eru was left alone, he would be engrossed in it and work on it nonstop. Stopping the Knight Commander who didn't know how to restrain himself had gradually become the job of Ady, the Commander's aide. Eru was aware of that, so he agreed obediently as he scratched his cheek.

"Oh, we are stopping now for today too? Let's pack up then."

"Okay— Thank you for your hard work Boss."

At the same time, their conversation also became a signal for the Boss and the others to stop for the day, the scene that repeated itself day after day. After a simple clean up, they headed towards the mansion they were using as a dormitory. The Silver Phoenix Merchants which had the roles of being the most powerful combat unit and equipment developers had more than adequate amenities. The Knight Commander Eru was even assigned a personal room.

Ady followed Eru who was heading to his room as if this was the most natural thing in the world, then entered his quarters, and followed him onto his bed. Eru could only hold his head exasperatedly and said:

".....Ady. I think I am saying the same thing every day. You also got your own room, so go back there to sleep."

"That might be so! But listen, Eru. Even though this is an allied nation, we can't leave an important person like you alone! As a member of the Silver Phoenix Knights, and the Commander's aide, I am volunteering to be your bodyguard! ... So let's sleep together."

"I don't get how you arrive at that conclusion..."

Eru was dumbfounded, but didn't pursue the matter. This happens too often, and reminding Ady about it was useless too. Ady got between the sheets, snuggled next to Eru and gently embraced him in her arms.

"Hufufu, hugging Eru is so comfortable. This is so healing... and soothing, I can sleep tight tonight~"

Ady hugged him tight and brushed his hair. Eru said with a sigh:

“This kid is really... Did I pamper you too much? You never grow out of your habit of acting spoiled. And don't think I will be your hug pillow forever, I might have a growth spurt in the future.”

"Hmm—? Let's talk about it when you are taller than me."

"... Meanie."

Eru turned away and pretended to sleep out of spite. Ady didn't mind as she patted his head happily, and closed her eyes after bidding him good night. A short while later, the sound of steady breathing came from their bed.

Even later into the night. The moving clouds covered the faint moonlight, making the night even darker. Inside the forest where even the vegetation seemed to be sleeping, giant figures sprinted by. They were painted a shade of black that merges into the night, and the figures were a head taller than the trees around them. Moving almost silently, they grazed pass the forest like the wind. The huge shadows finally made it out of the vegetation, and could see the light from the city in front of them. It would be quite some time before the bustling city fall into deep slumber. A giant hid in the forest, and pointed to the front with very slight movements.

Acting under its command, numerous figures appeared, as if they materialized from the very forest. Dressed in attire that melded into the darkness and silent movements, the human figures that were as difficult to spot as the giants advanced quietly.

No matter how lively Missillier was, it would still fall into slumber deep into the night. There were still activities ongoing in the city, which was a testament to the bustling city. The dark figures avoided the bright areas, and dashed from shadows to shadows, such as the roofs of houses and deserted alleyways as their checkpoint. Their goal was the center of the city, the mansion

where the Kuscheperca royal and the Silver Phoenix Knights were based.

Deep into the night when almost everyone was asleep, intruders appeared in the building with the ice cold air of the night. Sentries were posted everywhere, but that was meaningless for the shadows who had completely covered their tracks. The mansion wasn't built for defence in the first place, so the shadows tread quietly across the silent corridors. After signalling each other with hand gestures, they splitted up.

An intruder clad entirely in black and moving like the darkness itself ran soundlessly inside the mansion, and reached a certain room very quickly. He opened the door quietly and peeked inside. There were two rooms inside, light and several maids could be seen in the room closer to the entrance. They were maids, and also bodyguards for the person in the room further in. This room must belong to someone with very high status. The shadow smirked under the scarf wrapped around his face.

He drew his dagger silently. Potent poison was applied to the blade, just a grazing wound was enough to kill. He then slid into the room from that gap— He didn't make any sound, but the slight air movement was enough for the maids to detect the intruder. The intruder threw his daggers, aiming at the maids who were about to scream— Even though he threw several daggers at one go, they still flew in an accurate arc, piercing the throats of the maids.

The poison on the daggers reaped the lives of the maids quickly. The intruder was afraid that the sound of the maids collapsing would wake the mistress of the room, but that worry was unnecessary.

He picked up a lamp and walked deeper in, drawing near the bed to confirm the identity of the person sleeping there. There was no mistake, she was Princess Eleonora of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom.

After ascertaining that, the intruder took out a cloth and bottle. He then pressed the cloth that had been stained by the fluids from the

bottle onto Eleonora's mouth. She resisted for a while, and stopped abruptly. The bottle contained powerful anesthetics, so even if he was a bit rough during the abduction process, she wouldn't wake up.

The orders of the shadows intruding the mansion was to capture the Princess on sight if possible, and to kill her if that wasn't an option. If he could whisk her away, the mission would be a success. The shadow's smile deepened under the scarf around his face. As he was preparing to leave the room— he encountered something unexpected.

Suddenly, a loud crack of thunder shook every corner of the mansion like thunder. The thunder stopped moving guardedly, focusing on his ears and trying to grasp the situation. It was a little cloudy, but the weather was stable and unlikely for thunder to suddenly crack. The abnormal situation that happened suddenly was signs of a 'magical phenomenon. When he thought this far, he immediately charged towards the entrance of the room to escape—

Someone kicked open the door at this moment, and barged into the room to block his way. It was Chid. When he saw the person the figure was carrying on his shoulder, he let loose a feral growl:

“Hey, who do you think you are taking away?”

The figure didn't answer, and threw a dagger without a second glance. Chid wielded his Bayonet Staff calmly in response to this sudden attack. The magic script 'Spark Dart' he already compiled spread into several weak purple lightning that shot down the daggers. It also stunned the figure before he could move and immobilize him. All these attacks avoided the princess, and hit their targets accurately.

Even though the black figure was a trained veteran, he couldn't withstand the lightning attacks for too long. As his body spasm in a strange dance, the princess on his shoulders fell off. The moment he saw that, Chid moved at full speed, using the immense strength from physical boost to kick the black figure. The figure flew away in the shape of a '<' as if he had collided with a bull, and stopped

moving after hitting the wall.

The princess who had been tossed onto the ground crudely showed no signs of waking up. Chid held her with a worried face, and placed his hand onto her mouth to check her breathing.

“... Good, she’s fine.”

Chid sighed in relief after feeling her gentle breathing. Her life wasn’t in danger, she was just sleeping. Chid guessed that she had fell into deep slumber after being forced to inhale some sort of drugs.

“... Just who are the ones intruding? No matter what, staying here seems like a bad idea.”

He alone might not be enough to protect the unconscious Princess. Chid carefully picked up the Princess, and headed over to meet the other members of the Silver Phoenix Knights.

Turning the clock back a little.

Another shadow also infiltrated a different room. He looked quietly in the dark, confirming the room’s layout, and saw the bed at the end of the room, amongst the things scattered all over the floor. He got closer, and saw that there was two person’s worth of bulge under the sheets, and their breathing was also light. Seeing that his target was fast asleep, he drew his dagger and swung the poisoned blade. The ones sleeping would probably fall into eternal slumber without even knowing what happened. He cautiously approached the edge of the bed, and raised his lethal blade high—

In that instant, the sheets were thrown up. Despite the sheets obscuring his vision, he still stabbed his dagger out steadily. He only felt the soft sensation of cutting cloth without piercing flesh. As the sheets fell onto the feet of the shadow that retreated hastily, someone who was sleeping just now was standing behind it— Ady.

She made no effort in hiding her displeasure, asking the intruder:

“... Hey, who are you? You didn't come to wake us right? I was sleeping so soundly with Eru, how dare you interfere...!!”

The intruder didn't respond, and only threw a dagger silently. He will win if the blade grazed her skin. But before it reached its target, Ady swung the Bayonet Staff in her hands. She had a habit of keeping her weapon within arm's reach when she sleep.

Immediately after that, her powerful processing prowess compiled a spell in a matter of seconds— A thunder shook the entire building with its sudden bright flare. Ady didn't hesitate in unleashing a Middle spell 'Riot Sparrow'. The lightning that could even take out a mid level demon beast connect with the dagger and the intruder, blasting him outside.

“I will punish all who interrupt my healing time with lightning!”

Not just the Silver Phoenix Knights, all knights from Fremmevira Kingdom had to deal with nocturnal demon beasts occasionally, so they were trained to be alert of their surroundings even when they slept. The intruder might be skilled for a human, but his skills were far from a demon beasts.

"Ady, we still need to interrogate him for intel, don't kill him off just like that.”

As Eru got down from the other side of the bed, he reminded Ady in a soothing voice. She then inspected the intruder who got blown away unhappily. He was black from burns and spasming, but was still alive.

"No problem, he is quite lucky. He is still breathing, just knocked out.”

She seemed rather furious about being disturbed, as she kicked the intruder who was on the verge of dying.

“Is that so? Let's leave the rest to the experts then. That thunder earlier should have woken everyone, let's do a patrol and see if

there are any other victims or intruders.”

“Ughh, such a rare opportunity to sleep with Eru... Alright, but really! I will remember this...!!”

Eru groomed himself swiftly, then left the room with the growling Ady in tow.

The crack of thunder in the middle of the night was enough to wake everyone in the mansion. Knight from the Silver Phoenix Corps all got up after grabbing their swords. As expected of knights who hailing from Fremmevira Kingdom, their speed in waking up and grasping the situation was exceptional. It didn't take long for them to get ready for combat.

The infiltrators didn't dare intrude into the common rooms where the knights resided in, picking on the less secured single bedrooms. Unfortunately for the intruders, even though their targets the Kuscheperca royals are in the mansion, it was also the base of the Silver Phoenix Knights. Even though it was the middle of the night, their actions were still swift and ruthless. When the shadows who melded into the darkness got exposed by the magical light, the knights didn't hesitate in finishing them off in one hit.

The knights who charge out of their rooms gathered together and formed teams unconsciously.

"Edgar! We are fine here, any casualties in 1st Company!?"

“Luckily, there are none. The first thunder came from Ernesti's room right?”

“I think so... Oh right, what about the Princess!?”

"Hmmp, of course she is fine!"

They turned their heads to look, only to find Emrys who said these proudly as he escorted Martina and Isadora. Chid who was holding Eleonora carefully was also with them.

“Looks like everyone is fine, next would be to check if the non-

human members are okay.”

Eru who joined them with Ady in tow surveyed his surroundings to check the situation. Everyone in the Silver Phoenix Knights understood what he meant. The next second, Edgar led his 1st Company and sprinted for the workshop.

"Ara, seems like he was still very bothered. Well then, the 2nd Company will protect the royals... I think the roles had been reversed. Anyway, give it all you have got.”

Dietrich shrugged, and started giving instructions to his Company members.

The shadows didn't just infiltrate the mansion. As the Silver Phoenix Knights expected, they appeared in the workshop of Missillier City too.

Icy air filled the workshop. When they saw the rows of Silhouette Knight on the maintenance platform, the intruders smile deviously. Splitting up, they got into the pilot seats nimbly. Even if the design of the cockpits were different, the fundamental structure of the Silhouette Knights were all similar, and so were their operation methods. And so, they didn't hesitate in pulling the lever that activates the Ether Reactor.

— However, there wasn't any response. The Ether Reactor did not supply any mana, and the Silhouette Knight quickly exhausted what mana it had and stopped. The intruder pulled the lever frantically, but the Ether Reactor remained silent, even the Magius Engine was not responding. The intruder felt it was strange, and wondered if this machine had broken down. But not just him, his comrades around him showed no signs of success either. It was baffling why no one could activate the Silhouette Knights.

As their plan prioritized secrecy, they infiltrated without their Silhouette Knights. If they couldn't hijack the Silhouette Knights here, they would be outmatched. They tried everything they could

to start up the machine, but didn't realize that was a fatal mistake.

With a clank, the dull metallic sound came from the open chest armour. The intruder lift his head in a hurry, and his vision was filled by the massive body of the crafting use Silhouette Gear Motor Rad. Edgar who was riding on it glared at the intruder with gritted teeth and said:

".....Ernesti was right to be worried. You fools, do you think the same trick will work twice?"

The intruder tried to resist by drawing his dagger, but he was smacked down mercilessly by an iron fist. The arm strength of a Silhouette Gear powered by Crystal Tissue was enough to kill, but Edgar didn't seem to care. Hijacking Silhouette Knight— This scene overlapped with his past memories, and his mood was at its lowest point.

Similar scenes were happening to the Silhouette Knights around them. The 1st Company that operated Silhouette Gears just in case, gradually disposed of the intruders, and 'cleaned' up in no time. After they finished, Edgar ordered his Company:

"1st Company, board your machines! The intruders might not just be humans, we have to secure the area around the city! ... This will be a long night. Will the honour of the Silver Phoenix Knights— No, the honour of 1st Company on the line, I swear that our machines won't be hijacked a second time!!"

The united group acknowledged loudly as one. They boarded their machines in the workshops, drew their 'silver short sword' from their waist and inserted them into the 'Pattern Identifier'. With the link connected, the Magius Engine responded immediately. The Ether Reactor growled, and started the energy for the giant to move — mana. The steel giants stirred from their slumber one by one, and breathed sharply. Controlled by the pilot, their bodies trembled, and then stood up with the grinding sound of the Crystal Tissues.

The commander machine of 1st Company— The white knight

Ardiladcumber walked across the workshop with majestic strides, followed by the Karrrdatolle of his members. The 1st Company went through the door of the workshop, and rushed onto the battlefield to protect the city.

"... Did all of them fail!?"

Inside the forest near Missillier, Kerhild groaned behind her binoculars. The identity of the group in black that infiltrated Missillier— was actually the Copper Fang Knights commanded by her. This spy organization under the Žaloudek Army came to the city where the remnants of the old Kuscheperca army was based under the orders of First Princess Catalina.

They might be a knight corps in name, but they were still different from knights, and were specially trained spies. They were suited for small group and long term infiltration plans, and such sabotaging work should be their forte.

But the scene they saw from their binoculars crushed their confidence. With the dark sky as its backdrop, the white knight stood tall over the city, and Silhouette Knights which looked like its subordinates stood with him. There were no signs of her minions hijacking any machines, and none of them returned to her.

Kerhild gripped her binoculars anxiously.

"How can I report such failures back. I finally got hold of my chance...! Brace yourselves, we are going!!"

Tension broke the silence. Under her direction, black giants stood up in the forest. It had armour black in colour and a slender body, sharp claws protrude from its unusually long arms— These were the Copper Fang Knights' faceless Phantoms, Wittendora. Several years ago, they were almost wiped out during their mission to Fremmevira Kingdom. But thanks to the 'memento' they got back then, their merits were acknowledged, and they received permission to return to their home nation. They were even given newly developed Silhouette Knights and rebuild their Knight Corps.

The Phantoms rearing to go made revving noise, which reached the ears of the 1st Company who were protecting the city.

"... So they are hiding huh. Don't let any one of them pass!!"

Ardiladcumber drew its sword and activated its flexible coat at the same time. The Karrdatolle painted with white crosses also raised their shields and drew their swords alongside their captain.

The black figures dashed at them through the dark forest. Edgar saw the movements of the enemy through the Holo Monitor and opened his eyes wide. Their mobility was beyond that of normal Silhouette Knights. They were not as fast as the half man half horse Tzendrinble, but their speed was still amazing. Due to the work nature of the Copper Fang Knights, the Wittendora was designed to fulfil completely different functions from normal knights. The Strand Crystal Tissue hidden inside its slender body provided it with enormous power, which would be converted into overwhelming speed.

After getting right before 1st Company, the Phantoms leaped high into the sky with its speed and power. Their enormous weight didn't seem to be reflected in their movement, they were as light on their feet as stunt actors. The 1st Company suppressed their surprise and braced their shield against the aerial threat.

"Haaaahhh!!"

The Wittendoras didn't have weapons, and only relied on their sharp claws. With this point in mind, the 1st Company immediately kept a distance where swords would be more advantageous. As they were thinking that they had seized the initiative, the Wittendoras activated the special device in its pauldron, which extended their arms tremendously. This was a secret weapon called 'Shoot Claw', which enabled it to attack the knights from an unexpected distance.

They were completely caught off guard. In melee combat at close range, misjudging distance could be lethal. Many of the machines couldn't dodge or defend in time, and the Karrdatolle's armour flew

out with sparks and a metallic screech. Ignoring the defenders whose formation was a mess, the Wittendora pilots controlled their machines to land after doing a flip. After absorbing the impact of the landing with the flexibility of their bodies, they launched a follow up attack immediately.

“These guys are good at performing tricks, but just this much...!”

Edgar was surprised by the attack from the extended arm, but he fended it off with his exceptional reaction speed.

Ardiladcumber activated the flexible coat on his shoulder pauldrons, and strengthened the machine body by expending a large amount of mana. Sparks flew on the surface of the armour, and parried the attack of the Wittendora. But that wasn't the end of the Phantom's attack. Since it had two arms, the other arm clawed at Ardiladcumber that just fended off the first attack.

Flexible coat couldn't dodge the first extendable claw attack as the distance was too close, and had to block it. But the Wittendora's attack was a two hit combo that utilized both arms, and its pilot was sure that he had won. The body of the Wittendora might be slender, but the Shoot Claws that were full of Strand Crystal Tissue was powerful enough to pierce the Outer Skin of a Silhouette Knight.

All the paths of his opponents had been sealed. If it was a normal knight, this would probably end as he expected. But once again, Edgar made use of his extraordinary ability to adapt.

The moment he saw the other arm move, Edgar quickly shift his shield onto his opponent's line of attack. In order to keep from interfering with its option works, Ardiladcumber's shield was a size smaller, and its mobility proved useful at this very instant. The Shoot Claws hit the shield straight on, and sunk in with the sound of metallic twisting. After his assumption had been overturned, the pilot of the Wittendoras couldn't react momentarily. This slight hesitation was fatal before a pilot like Edgar. As he kept the arm of the Wittendora at bay, he retracted his option works.

"Let me show you the power of Ardiladcumber!!"

Edgar yelled and step into his pedal, and Ardiladcumber which had been transformed into a hunk of hard steel collided strongly with the Wittendora. The Wittendora was designed to be light, and had weak Outer Skin. In a battle with an adversary that was heavier and stronger than it, the Wittendora was helpless. Its black armour cracked and twisted, and Crystal shards were scattered all over the place.

The Wittendora that was wrecked hit the ground hard and turned still. Edgar immediately followed up with an attack. Ardiladcumber took a step forward and swing its sword, cutting the fragile body of its enemy into two.

After completely annihilating his foe, Edgar confirmed the situation around him— the knights of 1st Company seemed to be having a hard fight. The surprise attack of the enemy was very effective, and they were covered in black armour, making it hard to discern the Phantoms that were sprinting at high speed. Difficult opponents to engage at night.

“Looks like we need some lighting.”

Edgar muttered, then activated his option works, deploying the Silhouette Arms inside. The reticle locked onto its target in the darkness of the night, a Phantom who was in a close fight with a Karrdatolle just happened to be in his range. Edgar pulled the trigger immediately, and the flame shots found the Phantoms accurately, exploding into a blossoming flower of fire in its body. The defeated Phantom fell on the spot, reduced into a burning heap. The illumination from the center of the battlefield revealed the bodies of the Phantoms that had melded with the dark. After stripping off the Phantoms’ coat of darkness, the 1st Company could finally see their appearance clearly.

“The enemy is agile but frail. Don’t be fooled, engage them calmly!”

Since they could locate the enemy easily, the counter attacks of the

1st Company became more effective. The fragile bodies of the Phantoms fell one after another to the swords of the Silhouette Knights. It didn't take long for the 1st Company to build on their success and wipe out all their enemy.

Right before dawn breaks, Missillier City reverted to its silence in the night. The wreckage of many Phantoms were littered around the city, and the 1st Company remained vigilant.

Inside the mansion, the members of 2nd Company stood guard in various positions. The Kuscheperca royals were led to the center of the mansion, where the iron wall defence of Eru, Chid, Ady and Emrys watched over them.

"The battles outside had ceased too, have we won...? Launching a night raid and targeting Ellie, what despicable people. I hate such underhanded schemes."

"This is war, Young Master. Assassinating the key personnel of the enemy will keep the amount of trouble and damage down too. But it is true that the fight wasn't satisfying, they should have sent more Silhouette Knight."

"Sometimes, I feel your thinking is weird."

Emrys glared at Eru besides him exasperatedly. He then averted his eyes and tried to muddle it by saying:

"Cough cough! Leaving that aside, the Žaloudek Kingdom that had always done thing by force had started resorting to night raids. Such sneak attacks might seem effective, but it is actually a risky gamble. Looks like they are getting anxious."

"... We haven't taken the eastern territory yet, are they really that worried?"

Of the royals who showed signs of fatigue and nervousness, only Martina appeared composed. But what Eru said troubled her.

“Because we committed the Vido into battle, they couldn’t overwhelm us as easily as before. My guess is they want to settle it before things become messy? Because the longer we drag this, the more it is to our advantage.”

In fact, the next generation of Resvants were being modified with haste, and their combat prowess would increase with time. It wasn’t clear how much Žaloudek knew, but it was clear how frantic the enemy was.

"We are at least strong enough to be seen as a threat by them. This incident is proof of that—"

When she heard that, Martina opened her eyes wide and amended her understanding of the situation. The night raid incident ended with Eru’s soft muttering.

That morning, the Silver Phoenix Knights inspected the battlefield around the city.

They recovered many wreckages of Wittendora from the place where the Silhouette Knights fought. As for the spies that infiltrated the mansion and workshop, they were either dead or captured after their battle with the Silver Phoenix Knights

As they confirmed the results of the battle, the name of the Copper Fang Knights Knight Commander 'Kerhild Hietakangas' was not present.

Chapter 36: Mobilization of the Black Skull Knights

The sound of glass shattering echoed in the room.

This was the former capital of Delvincourt, which now served as the governance house of the Kuscheperca province. In the audience hall inside the castle at the center of the city, the commander-in-chief of the Žaloudek Army— Second Prince Cristóbal, was glaring at the report he just received.

“Just how much time and effort do you need to deal with that little wench and a few thieves!? You still dare to call yourselves the elites of Žaloudek!?”

It had been three months since he ordered the Black Skull Knights to pursue the Kuscheperca royals and exterminate the terrorists. The report detailing the results achieved during this period was clutched in his hand, all wrinkled. There were two main points—

First was the status of the unit garrisoned in the eastern territories. The resistance group that Cristóbal called ‘thieves’ had cut off the combat powers in all regions, and the survivors of the old Kuscheperca aristocracy had been raising the flag of revolt one after another. As they were equipped with new machine models that specialized in long range combat, the Tyrants had difficulty in facing them, much less suppressing them.

The other point was the Black Skull Knights diverted from the northern and southern territories to the east. Their neigh stoppable march was stalled by the sabotage actions of mini Silhouette Knights. Aside from that, the tower shaped new machine models that specialized in long range attacks proved incredibly strong in

base defences, which gave the Black Skull Knights a tough time. There were reports of the enemy's harassing actions in all the provinces— The precise details were written in the reports.

And in conclusion, the report stated that overwhelming the enemy with the machine's superior performance was no longer feasible. It wouldn't be easy to take the east, and more time would be needed to muster the forces. It was natural for Cristóbal who didn't have much patience to fume with rage. Cristóbal paid no heed to the attendants frantically clearing up the broken pieces of the glass he threw out in fury, and composed himself and his emotions.

“Is this the proverbial cornered rat? How persistent...!”

Cristóbal rested his elbow heavily onto the throne, his gaze seemed to be focusing on a spot in mid air. He wasn't trying to escape from reality, but was actually analysing his enemy clearly.

“The troublesome one isn't the wench, but the thieves... No, damn those original machine models! It would be terrible if we give them more time.”

The escape of the Princess and the new weapons of the remnants of old Kuscheperca. The shadow of Fremmevira's demon beast guards could be seen in all these. He felt a sting of bitterness in his heart. If Žaloudek Kingdom had to fight a nation where the new Silhouette Knights were developed from, it would certainly be a huge threat. That might be so, but who would have thought that their presence would have such a big influence on the war?

In the beginning, Žaloudek Army adopted the blitzkrieg attack. This revolutionary tactic uses Levitate Ship to destroy the core of the enemy, with the superior power output of the new Silhouette Knight as support. They were well prepared for the invasion of Kuscheperca. And the truth was, they were just one step away from completely conquering Kuscheperca. But right now, not only were

the royals kidnapped, the Žaloudeks were also being suppressed on the battlefield, and this was the crucial moment where the outcome of the war would be decided.

“We can’t drag this on... I have to be ready to bet it all.”

After considering the situation, Cristóbal made his decision.

His eyes fell on the laid out Kuscheperca territory map. There were many chess pieces representing the Black Knights placed at the junction linking the north south highway to the east. A piece with a crown was placed in the east, symbolizing the Kuscheperca royals.

He picked up the ship-shaped pieces that had been scattered all over the map, which of course represented their aces, the Levitate Ships. He then smacked them down onto a certain spot on the map. On that spot of the map, was the name of the city where the eastern governance house was located— Fontaine.

“It is done to do things the old fashioned way... Relay the orders, I am mobilizing the unit garrisoning the central territories. Recall the Steel Wing Knights! Use our remaining forces to the largest extent, and take down the east in one shot. Ready the men, I will be leading this expedition personally!!”

On Cristóbal’s orders, his attendants all ran off in a hurry. Caught up in his agitated emotions, Cristóbal continued staring at the map, with an ominous feeling in his heart— an intense battle was waiting for him in the east.

And soon after that, the First Princess Catalina rushed to him as if she was taking the place of the guards who ran off, with an anxious expression she rarely showed.

“Crist! I just heard that you are going to heading there directly with

your troops? Know where you stand! How can the Commander-in-Chief act so brashly...”

It was rare sight, seeing Cristóbal cut her off:

“... Sister, you seemed to be scheming something and dispatching your minions huh? I won't say anything more, but since the situation didn't turn for the better, I take it that they failed right?”

Catalina was dumbstruck. She didn't expect Crist to know that the Copper Fang Knights failed.

“We have wasted too much time! It is too late for tricks now. If we don't act now, the situation will only become worse.”

Even Catalina who didn't understand warfare agreed with this point. On the hand, because Cristóbal was proficient in waging war and possessed the instinct of a general, his sensitive nose could sniff out this danger. A firm light shone in his eyes, and Catalina understood that she couldn't stop her brother no matter how she tried. She sighed, and pointed quietly to a spot on the map and said:

“The escaped royals and the demon beast guard from Fremmevira are here. They are using a small relay station city as their base.”

Although the Copper Fang Knights failed, it wasn't a complete loss. They obtained an intel that the remnants of the old Kuschepercas were based there.

Cristóbal glanced at the tip of his sister's finger, then said with a ferocious smile:

“I'm impressed, thank you sister. We are moving out! We will head for Fontaine first, then we will crush the thieves in Missillier next!!”

And so, Cristóbal let the Black Skull Knights main forces garrisoned in the central governance house, and set off for the eastern governance house Fontaine. After the place was assaulted by the Silver Phoenix Knights and lost the royals, it had sealed the city gates. But now, they were opened again to receive Cristóbal.

And one short week later, Fontaine was filled with the air of war once again. The Black Skull Knights main forces that came to this city with Cristóbal— one full brigade (a hundred odd machines) started advancing towards the east.

The Black Knights advanced on stone paved roads. Flying above them was the ace in the hole of the Žaloudek Kingdom— ten Levitate Ships. Most of the Levitate Ships of the Steel Wing Knights had congregated here, this was practically a large invasion.

— The Žaloudek Army began their march.

It was impossible for such a huge army to be covert, and news reached Missillier, the remnants of the old Kuscheperca army and the Silver Phoenix Knights.

The advancing Žaloudek Army and the remnants of the old Kuscheperca army would clash sooner or later.

The vanguard of the Žaloudek Army traveling on the Pan-Kucher road was about to reach the Aubigne Mountains. The further away they were from the central regions, the more dangerous the terrain gets, and Baron Letonmaki's territories were no exception.

Most of Baron Letonmaki's land was between the valleys of the Aubigne Mountain Range, it was infertile and unsuitable for

agricultural development. But that was the reason it was a good place to defend the east. Large towns and forts were built along the few main roads within the Baron's territories, which usually served as the rest stop for passing merchants. Aside from that, the undulating terrain also functions as natural forts.

"... How nostalgic, to think we will be carrying out our original duties."

A row of conical 'tower-like' figures were lined up along the wall that cut off the valley. These were Resvant Vido which got the nickname Tower Knights because of their appearance. As they were direct modification of the mass produced models, producing them was fast. Most of the old mass produced models had been modified and deployed to guard the crucial checkpoints.

"Sir, the deployment of the Tower Knights has been completed... And those who want to retreat back to Missillier have set off."

"I see. You may leave too, I won't blame you."

Two men were conversing on top of the walls. One of them was lord of the Letonmaki Barony— Baron Modesto Letonmaki. Besides him was the Knight Commander leading the Resvant Vidos.

"You are not leaving either, Sir. Are you jesting with me? Our *raison d'être* is to act as a shield in moments like this, how can we run so easily? The men who stayed behind feel the same way."

Baron Letonmaki smiled wryly after hearing the Knight Commander's answer. The Žaloudek Army was upon them, and even with the power of the Resvant Vidos, a minor noble stood no chance against them.

"... Just a bit more. The state of the art weapons designed by the

Silver Phoenix Merchants are in the midst of production, but they still need more time to finish.”

The latest model of Silhouette Knights was being crafted in Missillier. On the other hand, they wouldn't be able to match the Žaloudek Kingdom if they don't produce more of them.

And so, they chose to stay despite knowing they would be outnumbered. Letonmaki announced the dire situation to his entire force ahead of time, and permitted anyone to retrograde to Missillier and fight another day. Despite that, most of the soldiers stayed behind, displaying their pride as soldiers.

“Well then, so as to not shame our ancestors in these lands, we have to do our best to hinder them. Seems that our invited guests are here.”

Everyone present noticed without needing the Baron to notify them.

Black steel giants approached menacingly, dragging steps with steam emitting from them, entering the valley along the narrow mountain path. They then got into their usual rank formation and advanced solemnly as they trained the pikes in their hands forward. The black wall and the stone walls faced off against each other some distance away.

The Žaloudek army was collected before the virtually indestructible terrain and didn't even stop. Their overly calm demeanour even made the Letonmaki Barony's army shiver. Despite their advantage in terrain, they were gradually crushed by the aura of the enemy closing in. The Knight Commander kept his binoculars, and admonished his daunted men loudly:

“Fear not! The new Resvants you are piloting possesses unmatched defences! Think about your brethren fighting in other parts of the

Kingdom! There is nothing to fear. We will burn them all if they come near the wall!!”

The Resvant Vidos were the nemesis of the Tyrants of Žaloudek Kingdom. The Tyrants might have the upper hand in melee combat, but the wall was a great obstacle for them. The tower-shaped Silhouette Knights possessed unrivaled base defence prowess, and could destroy the slow Tyrants horde before they drew near. That was the reason why they could ground the Žaloudek Army invasion to a halt.

The pilots of the Vidos regain their composure and morale. Bracing themselves with a powerful roar, the tower-shaped machines with their Wall Robes deployed their Silhouette Arms, readying themselves to engage. They aimed at the black wall of steel, then the Knight Commander boarded his own Vido, and instructed loudly with the broadcast device inside his machine:

“You have permission to fire once the enemy enters our attack range! Don’t let any of them pass!”

The Silhouette Arms protruding out of the wall like thorns locked onto the Black Knights. The pilots gripped their controls tightly out of nervousness, and the trembling in their hands affected their back weapons, and even made their reticles waver.

It was clear to the Žaloudek Army that the Baron’s army was ready for them. In the face of firepower that could pierce heavy armour, their movements changed. They were still advancing, but their formation was different.

“Those guys... are not using a tight formation?”

The Black Knights who had always crush the enemy with their tight rank formation splitted into several smaller groups, and advanced

while keeping some distance from each other.

“They are using their brains too huh, trying to keep us from focusing our fire...”

The Knight Commander quickly realized the enemy’s intention and muttered bitterly. In order to break through the heavy armour of the Tyrants, they would concentrate the fire from their Silhouette Arms on them. The Žaloudek Army realized that maintaining the tight formation suitable for close combat was disadvantageous, that was why they spread out.

No matter what, there was only one thing the Baron’s army needed to do. The moment the Tyrants got into range, a hail of projectiles rained mercilessly from the walls. The bullets of destruction flashing orange fell onto the head of the Žaloudek Army that had splitted up by platoons. The Tyrants were drowning in explosions and flames.

In the past, the Žaloudek Army would choose to advance forcefully, but they reacted differently this time — they retreated swiftly when they saw the projectiles raining down on them.

When the Knight Commander saw this, he couldn’t help clicking his tongue. Projectiles compiled by magic had the restriction of ‘effective range’, because the source of mana in the air — Ether, will disrupt the movement of the projectile. Once they pass the effective range, the projectile will crumble quickly and disappear.

After the Tyrants left the effective range of the Vido, they parried the projectiles easily without even taking a stance. The dissipating projectiles were nothing for their heavy armour. The soldiers observing from the walls announced this result to the entire army, and the firing stopped. Calm returned to the battlefield.

Immediately after that, the sound of trumpets and gongs rang out

from the Žaloudek Army. With instructions coming from behind, the Tyrants renewed their advance. Their pace was already slow, but it became even more cautious now as they moved into the effective range of the Silhouette Arms. The Baron's army didn't attack this time as the observers on the wall stared intently with binoculars, trying to grasp the distance between them and the enemy. Messengers ran more frequently, increasing the speed of communications.

"Don't act rashly, wait for the observers' instruction before commencing fire!"

"No, not yet... It won't cause enough damage right now, wait until they get into a distance where they can't flee anymore!"

The Baron's army had to act cautiously. There were two fatal flaws with the Resvant Vido which was equipped with multiple Silhouette Arms and possessed overwhelming firepower. First was its obvious lack of mobility. And the other was its slow mana regeneration speed. The Wall Robe which was made entirely from Capacity Frame had extraordinary mana storage, but the Ether Reactor was still the same. Once they exhaust their mana, they would need a very long time to recover. The time needed for this would be fatal during a battle.

In order to defeat the Tyrants with concentrated fire, they had to avoid wasting bullets needlessly.

"Damn it, what a tease."

Not only did they change their formation, the movements of the Žaloudek Army was extremely careful. Betting their lives on the line, gauging range and mana power. Their tactics in offense and defence was like walking on a tight wire. The Black Knights advanced another step — and wasn't attacked. They edged forward again— the projectiles still weren't coming.

At this moment, the Black Knights stopped their advance. They were within effective range, but still too far away. The Knight Commander leading the Barony army was in a dilemma, agonizing about starting the attack. Their enemy was still too far, ready to retreat at any moment. Should they launch an attack anyway to keep them in check? Instead of a battle between armies, this was closer to a melee fight aimed at each other's weak point. The valley which was now a battlefield was filled with tension so thick you could cut it with a knife.

A sudden gust of wind blew across the stagnant battlefield, unsettling the balance of the battle. This wind wasn't a work of nature, and came along with a shadow that blocked out the sun above — And it wasn't the shadows of the clouds. In the cloudy sky, something darker with a clearer silhouette than the clouds appeared. The Barony Army didn't need too much time to figure out what it was. Since they could see their shadows, it meant they were close enough physically to be discerned with the naked eye.

—Levitate Ships.

Žaloudek Army didn't only have the Black Knights, they also have the ace that destroyed the Kuscheperca Kingdom — the Steel Wing Knights. Baron Letonmaki, who saw the 10 Levitate Ships groaned angrily.

The airborne ship wasn't affected by the terrain and drifted over the mountains easily, ignoring the walls and reaching right on top of the gates. For the Levitate Ships, the natural barriers Baron Letonmaki took so much pride in were meaningless. Going by past experience, the soldiers in the Barony could easily imagine what the Levitate Ships would do next. The Knight Commander of the Barony shouted with spittle flying:

“... Oh no! Tower Knights, aim for the Levitate Ships! Don't let them land!!”

The Vidos trained their reticles to the air, and the worst footsteps they could imagine reached their ears — moving in concert with the Levitate Ships, the Black Skull Knights advanced once again. There was no caution in their actions this time as they pushed forth like water from a broken dam. If they are not engaged immediately, the Black Knights will reach the walls in no time. A pincer attack from land and air caused the mind of the Barony army to go numb.

“Tower Knights, aim for the Levitate Ships, ignore the Black Knights...! There is no retreat for us in the first place, so take down as many ships as we can for our brethrens behind us!!”

They were checkmated. After realizing that, Baron Letonmaki made up his mind and issued the order. They knew very well what fate awaited them when they stayed behind for this battle, so there was nothing to regret.

Vido endured the terror of the approaching Black Knights, lift their heads as one and opened fire at the Levitate Ships floating leisurely in the air. The orange rain flew towards the sky, and exploded into fireworks in the air.

However, the Levitate ships continued to advance nonchalantly. The first practical flying weapon — the Levitate Ships, was designed with the engagement enemies on the ground in mind. Hence, its body that looked like an overturned seafaring vessel had a bottom reinforced with steel into sturdy armour, and could handle a few projectile shots easily. At this moment, several of the vessels, suddenly descended at a steep angle, and brushed right over the top of the walls without even slowing.

The Resvant Vidos possessed an aiming function that was tied to its firing system, but aiming was still done manually by the pilots. The machine itself was a rushed job, and the pilots weren't trained to shoot flying targets, so even the occasional lucky shot that landed couldn't pierce the armour. The Levitate Ships forcibly air dropped

the Silhouette Knights under such conditions, the hatch at its bottom opening and machines tied to wires jumped out one after another.

They were painted black, which was the standard of the Žaloudek Army, but its body was thin and slender. These weren't Tyrants, but the Wittendoras of the Copper Fang Knights.

The Wittendora detached its wire in mid air, from a height that would destroy a Tyrant from its own weight. Its unique design for intel purposes allowed the Wittendora to use the flexibility of its body to absorb the impact, and land on the walls.

The Wittendoras' Crystal Tissue screeched loudly as they pounced on the Vido. Although the Vido had powerful defences in the form of its Wall Robe, but its weight was also its shackles, slowing its movements down. Making it unsuitable for close quarters combat. In the eyes of the light Wittendora, they were as slow as tortoises, the difference in their mobility was obvious. On top of that, the Wall Robes had gaps all over the place because of the deployed Silhouette Arms, so the Wittendora could easily go behind the machines and target the weak points one after another. Some used Stilettos, while others struck directly with their claws, destroying one Vido after another.

"Tower Knight units, fight at your own discretion! It's fine to abandon your robe, take down as many of them as you can!"

Heavy metal clunked onto the ground loudly as the Resvant Vidos ditched their Wall Robes. In times of emergencies and great danger, the Robes had the function to be uncoupled. And now was that time.

Once they abandoned their advantage of the Wall Robe, what was left was a normal Resvant with back weapons. Despite their valiant efforts to fight with their Silhouette Arms, the Wittendora obviously

held the upper hand in melee combat. The Tower Knights that stood tall in defence of the wall fell like broken bits of a comb.

The Barony that had been forced to a corner received another sign that their end was near — an intense trembling came from under their feet as the Black Knights finally made it to the wall.

Discarding their halberd in favour of mini battering rams, they started knocking down the walls. The Strand Crystal Tissues inside their black steel body churned, and even the sturdy steel made city gate couldn't stand up to the fully powered mini battering ram, and was bent out of shape quickly.

After multiple hits, the gate was twisted like waves, and finally broke down as the limit of its endurance was reached. The footfalls of destruction soon followed. In the wake of the dust that had been kicked up, the Black Knights flooded in. With their defences broken through, the Resvant Vidos fell to the battering rams before they could bring their opponents down. Before the might of the Black Knights' armour, their projectiles and blades were laughably weak.

The Barony army lost the power to turn the tide of battle.

“... So this is the true might of the Žaloudek Army...”

As he watched the fort being ravaged, Baron Letonmaki's knees turned weak and he fell on his knees. He wasn't considered a target since he wasn't piloting a Silhouette Knight and was still safe in the chaos. But that was just a matter of time. The Black Knights was pouring into the gates, and after they suppressed the Silhouette Knights, their infantry will follow right behind.

“Princess, Lady Martina, forgive my incompetence... Lord Emrys, I will leave the rest to y...”

Baron Letonmaki's last words were drowned out by the thundering

footsteps of the Black Knights.

After the Black Skull Knights trampled over Baron Letonmaki's lands, they resumed their march as if nothing ever happened.

News of Baron Letonmaki's territory falling reached Missillier quickly on horseback.

"I see, the enemy main forces have started moving! The earlier night raid exposed our base, so I knew it is just a matter of time before they attacked..."

Emrys who heard the news groaned with a solemn face. The Silver Phoenix Merchants still needed more time to complete all the new machines. From the speed of the Žaloudek Army's advance, it wasn't clear if they could make it in time.

"We have prepared ourselves mentally, if the time calls for it, we the Silver Phoenix Knights will stop them."

With the Tzendrinble's leg power, this proposal was now plausible. As he headed for the workshop to prepare for that, Martina appeared before him.

"A-Aunt..."

Emrys was speechless when he saw his aunt's appearance. She didn't wear her usual dress, but clothes that resembled those of a man, which prioritized mobility. With leather armour fixed over her clothes, it was clear she was dressed for battle.

"I heard the news, war is upon us, we can't waste the time Lord

Letonmaki bought for us. After all, we stayed in this city for the sake of the inevitable battle.”

“Of course, I don’t plan to lose! But Aunt, from the way that you are dressed, are you planning to take the field?

Seeing her nephew worrying about her, Martina shook her head with a wry smile and said:

“That’s impossible. I will leave the fighting to you, I don’t think we will be of much use. It is better for me to be prepared, I don’t want to become a burden.”

That night when the old capital Delvincourt fell, she felt deep regret that she couldn’t do anything other than fleeing. No, her flight should have been done better.

There was no terrain more suited for defence than Baron Letonmaki’s territory, so the Žaloudek Army will flood in sooner or later. In that case, they would need to be fully prepared to avoid the same mistake.

“... Alright. Leave the rest to us, we will definitely get the weapons ready in time and teach those guys a painful lesson. I won’t let the Black Knights or the Levitate Ships come near Aunt and the others again!”

Since the start of the war, no one in the Kuscheperca Army could defeat the Levitate Ship. In a fight against the Žaloudek Army that included Levitate Ships, the Silver Phoenix Knights was the only Knight Corps that didn’t lose to them, and even gave the remnant army of the old Kuscheperca new weapons.

“Yes Emrys. I believe in all of you.”

Both sides did their best in preparation for the arrival of that moment — time passed steadily towards the final battle.

After passing through Baron Letonmaki's territory, there was nothing to stop the Žaloudek Army. All the forts along the Pan-Kucher road had been abandoned to avoid the threat of the Levitate Ships during the early stage of the war. Even the garrison in most of the territories had been withdrawn.

“Consolidating their forces? That wench is timid as usual.”

The Second Prince of Žaloudek Kingdom, Cristóbal led this eastern invasion force personally. Riding on the special command vessel that served as the flagship, and positioned himself at the rearmost of the unit. He could survey the entire Žaloudek Army formation from there clearly. The neat advancing ranks of Black Skull Knights and the Steel Wing Knights' Levitate Ships flying in formation like two spread wings — Just the combat forces here were enough to subjugate a mid-sized country. Using it to deal with the remnants of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom that wasn't even a proper nation was overkill.

He was not taking the damages his forces had suffered lightly, and was planning to eliminate the royals and the demon beast guards in one fell swoop, that's why he mobilized all the men he could get.

“But it is boring when nothing happens.”

His words invoked light laughter on the bridge of the Levitate Ship. For this to be the extent of the remnant's final surge was too unsightly, that was their consensus. Their advance had been too smooth, as if they were traveling through no man's sky. It was proceeding so well that the slow Tyrants were moving at a quicker pace than expected.

It didn't take long for the Žaloudek Army to reach Missillier. Their adversary had withdrawn all their forces to this base, and Missillier which was originally a rest stop town would be packed tightly with the Tower Knights. Seems like their opponent had prepared the firepower to put up a fair fight. Since they couldn't win against the Black Skull Knights on the open field, the remnants of the old Kuscheperca Army could only adopt a defensive tactic.

The corner of Cristóbal's lips curled up fearlessly. During the battle in Baron Letonmaki's territory, all the weak points of the Tower Knights had been exposed, and they were no longer a threat to his Black Skull Knights.

"Alright, all units halt! Rest up and ready the men. The enemy's funeral is coming...!"

The Žaloudek Army obeyed his command, and set up a makeshift base along the road. Having the chance to strike the final blow to the enemy raised their morale, but they had accumulated a lot of fatigue during their long campaign. The soldiers needed to rest before the battle, and they had no reason to panic. They just needed to regain their endurance, and devastate the enemy at their peak.

There was a group watching the Žaloudek Army base from a distance. Hidden in the forest around the camp, the Silhouette Gears — Shadowlad was camouflaged with the colours of the background. After the Blue Hawk Knights retreated from the Žaloudek Army at Fontaine, They had been spying on their troop movements.

The Žaloudek Army had no intentions of hiding their troop movements. After all, Missillier had their backs to Mount Aubigne and there was nowhere to run. Speaking in terms of military tactics, they had their backs to the wall. In the first place, it was impossible to hide such a large force anyway. They probably knew that and stopped hiding, opting to intimidate the enemy by marching forth

openly.

The Blue Hawk Knights were still hiding in the forest quietly, predicting the enemy's action accurately from their speed. All this was to grasp the moment the Žaloudek Army would begin their attack.

After resting for a day and a night, the soldiers had more or less recovered their strength, and couldn't wait for the orders to crush the enemy.

"Those remnants must be scared out of their wits. No, maybe they didn't have any officers left to lead them?"

The sneak attack they were prepared for during their rest didn't happen, and Cristóbal still looked displeased. He thought a prey forced into a corner would bear its fangs, but the remnants of the Kuscheperca army still hid behind their walls.

"Even the pride of a grand Kingdom is gone before the might of our Levitate Ships. Hmmp, don't let your guard down even if the enemy are scared out of their wits. Proceed as planned, get into position!"

He issued the order to the whole army, and the Žaloudeks began moving in the still of the night. Their plan was the same one they used when they attacked Delvincourt, which was a night raid with Levitate Ships.

During the battle in Baron Letonmaki's territory, it had been confirmed that it was difficult for the projectiles from the Tower Knights to bring down the Levitate Ships. However, Missillier had gathered all their forces from the surrounding regions, so even the Levitate Ships couldn't go near openly in the day, so they chose to launch a night raid instead. It would be harder to aim at the Levitate Ships under the cover of night compared to the day. The

night will protect them, and hinder the senses of the old Kuscheperca remnant army.

Once they successfully draw near and take down the enemy base, the rest would be simple. Be it the Kuscheperca's mass produced Resvants, or the modified Tower Knights Resvant Vidos, their close quarter combat abilities were lacking. Once they took down the Tower Knights, their Black Skull Knights main forces could break through from the front, and decimate the enemy forces in one go — This was the plan to achieve complete victory.

“Gentlemen of the Steel Wing Knights, it is time for you to take the stage. Go with the wind and bring us victory! Infiltrate the sky of the city!”

The black sails on both sides of the vessels became bloated as the Blow Engine filled them. The Levitate Ship glided across the night sky with the sound of the wind, and closed in on the slumbering Missillier city. Missillier was still even at this point of time. Although the night was advantageous for them, the Steel Wing Knights was still prepared to face some resistance. This situation was beyond disappointing, and felt chilling instead. After all, the Kuscheperca Kingdom lost their old capital Delvincourt from the exact same night raid, so how could they not be wary of this?

With no regards to their confusion, the Levitate Ships approached Missillier smoothly. Suppressing their doubts, the Steel Wing Knights started their descent and slowed down. Inside the vessels, preparations were made to airdrop the Black Skull Knights—

At this moment, a faint flash appeared on the ground.

It was a blazing bullet with an orange trail, projected magically. It flew straight into the air, but wasn't aiming to hit the Levitate Ships.

This projectile had a unique mechanism. At its core was a metallic casing which was sealed with magic before it was launched. The casing was extremely thin, and it would melt from the heat of the flame around it, resulting in its content coming into contact with the fire some moments later.

Sealed within the metallic casing was metallic powder, when it is heated by the flame magic, it would combust intensely. The bright balls of light exploding in the night sky one after another had the same effect of illumination flares from the other world.

In the forest around Missillier, spies from the Blue Hawk Knights were deployed there in advance. In this world without radar, they could only rely on the detection network powered by manpower — ‘Barrier’. They waited in this forest day and night, and finally accomplished their mission wonderfully. It wasn’t true that the old Kuscheperca remnant army wasn’t prepared for night raids. On the contrary, this was the moment they were waiting for — the chance to seize the initiative.

The man made satellite was brilliant and glaring, revealing the intruders hiding in the darkness.

There was a rustle of movements in a corner of the forest as if they were waiting for this cue. The Blue Hawk Knights weren’t the only ones who melded into the dark. Aside from the Steel Wing Knights, there were other hunters waiting eagerly for this moment.

Their Ether Reactor revved loudly, and the covers that had been painted the same colour as the forest was unveiled, exposing the gigantic body beneath it. Because of the horn on its head and its bottom half being a horse, it was 15m tall. It was the Centaur Knight Tzendrinble, which even had a carriage attached to it.

“Hufufufufu, so you meddlesome people are finally here. In order to ambush you lot, I couldn’t spend time with Eru! I won’t forgive

you!! In order to give souvenirs to Eru, victory for Chid and for me to vent, I will take all of you down...!”

Seated inside the cockpit of the Tzendrinble was Ady who was exhaling some sort of black substance as she gripped the control sticks tightly. Her beloved Tzendrinble seemed to be responding to its mistress’ killing intent as its Ether Reactor roared violently. There was no telling when the Žaloudek Army would attack, so the Tzendrinbles and their pilots, including Ady, were ordered to standby outside the city. And of course, she had to act separately from Eru, unable to neither dine nor sleep together. That’s why she was exhaling miasma as she glared at the Levitate Ships murderously.

“Uwah— that’s scary. But I agree to bringing them all down. In order to protect Ellie, I won’t let them win.”

Beside Ady’s machine that was burning with fighting spirit, Chid’s Tzendrinble has also started up. More Centaur Knights behind them began to move, they were the 3rd Company of the Silver Phoenix Knights, the Centaur Knight company.

“They are finally here! They made us wait really long... Alright everyone, let us get to work!”

Following Helvi’s lead, the members of 3rd Company also aimed through their Holo Monitors at the Levitate Ship illuminated by the flares. They then activated the new weapon installed onto the horse body of the Tzendrinbles.

It was a device of unknown purposes that had several rails placed in parallel. On top of it was the same number of giant reels of wire as there were rails. At the end of the rails were javelins, secured perpendicular to the ground.

“Let’s do it! Vertical Launched Javelin Thrower, fire!!”

Ady shouted a little too excitedly. Flames erupted from the javelins placed on the rails, and they flew into the sky, surrounded by sparkling light. The javelin changed its direction by adjusting the direction of its jets. The long tail of flame bursting out from its tail tore through the night air and sped ahead.

The identity of this device in the language of this world was ‘Large Assault Wire Javelin’. In earth language, it would be wire guided missiles. This long range wire controlled weapon, the Missile Javelin, was made by using the Silhouette Knights’ javelin, adding in catalyst crystal to control its thrust and angle, then attaching Silver Nerves to upload mana and magic scripts. This was the anti air weapon invented by Eru to be used by the Tzendrinbles, the Vertical Launched Javelin Thrower.

The Levitate Ship floating in the night air also noticed the mysterious object approaching with erupting flames. The Levitate Ships could accelerate by using the Blow Engine, but it couldn’t turn quickly to evade the speeding Javelins that were tracking them.

The Missile Javelins reached the limits of its Silver Nerves quickly, and after losing its mana supply, the Missile Javelins continued flying with its momentum. After gaining enough speed and power, the javelins stabbed one by one into the flank of the Levitate Ship. The Levitate Ship couldn’t do anything about the speeding javelins. They might have expected magical projectiles from the ground, a physical attack caught them off guard.

The Missile Javelin destroyed the armour and stabbed deep into the inside of the Levitate Ship. Some pierced the Tyrants parked in the hangar, while others ravaged the interior structure of the vessel. One of it happen to stab into the Etheric Levitator right in the center of the Levitate Ship, and the highly concentrated Ether within spewed out onto the already ravaged ship, lowering its

density.

The next second, the body of the vessel started to tilt. By using the unique characteristics of highly concentrated and pure Ether, a lifting force known as ‘float field’, which was how the Levitate Ship was staying airborne. As the seal of the device had been broken, Ether density fell and the Levitate Ship lost the field to support its weight.

The vessel that was floating leisurely just a moment ago fell like a ship sailing over a waterfall, and couldn’t right itself no matter how much wind it generated. Under the pull of gravity, the Levitate Ship continued to accelerate and finally crashed into the forest. Its potential energy was converted to destructive power as the Levitate Ship returned to the embrace of the earth, kicking up dust with a deep thud. The overwhelming destructive force destroyed it beyond recognition, decimating the Tyrants on board along with it.

“That’s one~! It’s hard to control, but can be managed! Again, again! I want to get them all!”

Ady who was in a great mood because her first shot worked perfectly prepared to shoot another in high spirits. The giant reels attached to the Tzendrinble started spinning at high speed, retracting the Silver Nerves that were attached to the Missile Javelin. In the meantime, several Silhouette Gears appeared on the wagon behind the Centaur Knight and took out a pile of javelins. They placed the Javelins onto the rails deftly, then connected the retracted Silver Nerves onto them.

The Vertical Launched Javelin Thrower did not have auto reload function, and could only be reloaded manually. And of course, this duty was taken up by the strong and agile Silhouette Gears. After the Silhouette Gears announced loudly that the loading was complete, they returned back onto the wagon. Once the area was cleared, the Missile Javelin flew into the air again with a trail of fire.

The controls were basically the same as Wire Anchors. When the Silver Nerves were still attached, the pilot of the Tzendrinble could control the direction of its flight, so the number of shots that could be fired at one time was dependent on the pilot's capability.

The ones deployed here were the twins who were taught personally by Eru and the trained members of the 3rd Company. Javelins flew into the air one after another, filling the night sky with twinkling stars.

All was silent inside the bridge of the Levitate Ship. Nobody could grasp the situation, and they only knew a ship had been sunk without any warning, in a way beyond their imagination. Their status as masters of the sky had been overturned, and they were the one being hunted one sidedly. Ironically, the thing that pulled the dazed crew back to their senses was the second wave of Missile Javelins attack. The vessel shook once again, and the cabin turned into a hellish place where screams echoed and fade.

"D-Damn it! Damn it!! How is this possible... It's a trap!? How can this be... They are insane! Are they waiting to be forced into a corner!? Tell the Figurehead to turn back right now! Speed up and get away from those lights!! Run into the darkness, we will just be targets if we stay like this!"

The Steel Wing Knights acting as vanguards fell into extreme confusion. The man made star fired from the ground illuminated the vicinity, while the strange harpoons spurting out flames kept assaulting the Levitate Ship. It was impossible to keep one's cool under such circumstances.

"Try to zigzag our approach, don't head in a straight line! And lower the altitude, it's fine to be a bit rough, airdrop the Tyrants!"

When they heard their orders, the crew forgot to repeat it back to

the Captain, and turned back towards him instead. He wanted to airdrop the Tyrants — in the face of a dangerous ambush, they didn't think this was a rational decision.

“... Let the Tyrants land to find the attackers, and destroy them! We will be sunk if this carries on anyway. We have to get them back before we fall!!”

As the first vessel was taken down too cleanly, they didn't realize that the attacks from the Missile Javelin wasn't that devastating every time, and would only be so destructive if it hits the Etheric Levitator right at the center. Without any prior knowledge about the structure of the Levitate Ships, the Silver Phoenix Knights didn't aim for any weak points, and only sunk a Levitate Ship by luck.

That might be so, but there was no way for the ship crew to know the truth. The Levitate Ships descended quickly as they charged forth. They planned to airdrop the Tyrants forcefully, then exit the battlefield after lightening its load. Right before they reached airdrop height, the crew stared at the altitude meter and prayed.

“The Vertical Launched Javelin Thrower is really powerful, but we can't bring them down if we don't aim for its weak point, there is still much to improve.”

In such a large scale battle (festival), there was no way a robot nerd will just shut up and watch. Eru sat inside the cockpit of his personal machine — the oni faced six armed samurai Ikaruga as he watched the performance of the Missile Javelin piercing through the night and the Levitate Ships sailing through them. One ship had several Missile Javelins stuck onto it, but it still broke through the heavy encirclement. Eru then locked onto that ship, and inputted commands to Ikaruga.

Ikaruga activated the Magius Jet Thrusters on its shoulders and waist, and a high pitched air intake noise erupted. The thrusters

became louder and shot out intense flames downwards, scorching the earth with its dancing fire. During this time, the demon beast heart known as Behemoth's Heart and Queen's Coronet gush out mana wildly, bestowing the demon god with endless power.

The next second, Ikaruga took to the air with its immense propulsion force. It ignored the laws of aerodynamics completely, breaking free from the pull of gravity with its immense thrusting force alone. This burning comet flew beyond the height of the Levitate Ship in one shot.

“Come, let me show you the power of Ikaruga. We have prepared many programmes for you! Please enjoy the in-built Wire Anchor, Rahu Fist!”

Eru tapped on his keyboard cheerfully, and switched the functions of the four arms on Ikaruga's back. The secured wrist started moving, with its Physical Boost spell weakened intentionally, and uncoupling its Crystal Tissue and Inner Skeleton link. Steel cables with Silver Nerves in them were connected to the hand, which produced the same effect as Anchor Wire.

In an instant, the Crystal Tissue inside the hand jettisoned out with the Crystal Tissue inside it as the catalyst. Similar to Magius Jet Thrusters, it was a propulsion system similar to Air Compression and explosion spells. The four liberated Rahu Fists left a fiery trail behind them as they flew through the air, rattling towards the Levitate Ship under Eru's guidance. With its neat rows of sharp fingers strengthened with Physical Boost, the Rahu Fist stabbed into the Levitate Ship easily, and performed its original function as hands, grabbing onto the inside of the Levitate Ship to secure itself.

“Caught you~! I won't let you escape this time!!”

Eru tapped his keyboard excitedly, and the reels turned angrily because of the inputted command, pulling Ikaruga's body up at an

incredible speed. When it was near enough, Ikaruga shot its jet in the opposite direction to stop its inertia, allowing it to land heavily onto the ship.

—The crew on the bridge of the Levitate Ship witnessed all that.

At first they thought it was just a shadow casted onto the Levitate Ship, but as they looked closer, the shadow landed before them, blocking the moonlight from their eyes. With a roar louder than the explosive Javelins, the noise from its air intake valves shook the entire vessel. With the moon as its backdrop, the six armed alien creaked its arms, covered by coat of red on its armour.

Fear beyond their imaginations stemmed from their hearts, and the crew's rational mind refused to accept this reality. At this moment, the moonlight mischievously lit up the machine's oni-like face — seeing that rage filled mask with his own eyes made the captain's expression even more twisted.

“M-Monster...”



That was his last word. The demon god that appeared on the ship lifted its great sword mercilessly, and smashed it down into the bridge. After receiving this destructive strike, the bridge was decimated in an instant. The sword then splitted into half, revealing complicated Silver Plates within it, which was a Silhouette Arm.

The demon god injected enormous amount of mana into the Sword Cannon, which was a composite Silhouette Arm.

Following that, the Sword Cannon shot out bright flames that pierced the wreckage of the bridge, straight into the interior of the Levitate Ship. The impact of the flame burned the ship's interior into crisp, and the force that had nowhere to vent shattered the bottom hatch, spewing outside.

The Etheric Levitator was destroyed easily, and the Levitate Ship started tilting after losing its levitate field. The demon god was certain that his work was done at this point, and leapt from the ship

“That’s one, the battle (festival) is just starting. There are other guests waiting... I have to increase the pace!”

There were still other Levitate Ships forced to scramble around by the Missile Javelins. Ikaruga activated the Magius Jet Thrusters once again, and flew towards his next prey.

Despite being shot by harpoons and the attack of a demon god of avarice... the Steel Wing Knights might have diminished numbers, but there were ships which airdropped the Black Knights successfully.

After dropping the Tyrants, the Levitate Ships immediately turned to escape. This was a death trap for the Levitate Ships, and they had no other options but to run.

The Tyrants that made landfall couldn't spare a second thought for the hastily leaving Levitate Ships, and ran for the woods immediately. The Steel Wing Knights suffered heavy losses in this battle, and they were determined to make the ones who caused this pay. After all, they had future to speak of. The Tyrants lacked

mobility, and the Levitate Ships won't be coming back. With no chance of survival, they were now suicide squads. Their mentality changed from being confident of victory to one with solemn resolve as they advanced.

Only their footsteps could be heard in the forest shrouded in darkness, and the occasional sound of something heavy crashing onto the ground. The demon god and the Centaur Knights were only focused on their targets in the air, so they might be able to move unabated without being discovered. As a spark of hope was ignited in the hearts of the Black Knights' pilots—

Several Silhouette Knight came out of the darkness and blocked their path. From their vague outline in the darkness, they seemed to be the mass produced machines of the Kuscheperca, Resvants.

“Hmmp, what can mere strawmans do...!?”

When they saw these machines took up battle stances, the pilots of the Black Knights felt a strong sense of dissonance. The Kuscheperca army should understand from experience that Resvants were no match for Tyrants. Why did they sent out such machines at this critical juncture—

“Well met, Black Knights, this will be your end...!”

With no regards for their confusion, the mysterious machine charged them after making this announcement in a low voice. The Kuscheperca pilot wasn't controlling a Resvant, although its appearance was the same, it was more advanced and powerful.

At that instant, the Black Knights had a hunch that they were the new machines of Kuscheperca. Their prediction proved accurate, they were the newest machine model developed by utilizing the technology provided by the Silver Phoenix Merchants —

‘Revantier’. They were limited in numbers, but there were enough of them to be deployed around Missillier.

“Our new knights won’t lose to you, Black Knights! Experience the humiliation we felt all this while!”

The ground tremored along with the roar of that knight. Without any gimmicks, both parties charged and collided into each other. If things didn’t change, the Kuscheperca knights wouldn’t be able to withstand the attack of the Tyrants, and be slaughtered by them. But it was different this time, Revantier blocked the mace of its opponent with its great sword. Although its feet sunk into the ground and the machine groaned under the weight, the Revantier still took this blow steadily.

“How can this be!? He blocked a blow from the Black Knight!”

This machine that had been modified with the design of the Kardatolle used Strand Crystal Tissue all over its body, and had the power output that lives up to its name of a new machine model. The heavy Tyrant still had the upper hand in maximum power output, but it wasn’t as one-sided as before. And this meant that the Black Knights with their inferior numbers was at a disadvantage.

In contrast with the shaken Black Knights, the Revantiers had a boost in morale from withstanding the blow and began a fierce counterattack. The maces which the Black Knights were so proud of didn’t hit the Revantiers, and were surrounded by multiple machines and taken down one by one instead. The Black Knights that made titanfall from the Levitate Ships were taken down one by one, and their numbers diminished gradually.

As time passes by, the battles inside Missillier became lesser, leaving behind a substantial number of Levitate Ship wreckages and Black Knights corpses in their place — The Steel Wing Knights was at the brink of destruction.

The fate of the Levitate Ships illuminated by the flares could be seen from the back of the formation too.

The Black Skull Knights who were supposed to advance after the Steel Wing Knights assault looked shocked, even forgetting their orders to move in. Sights of the Levitate Ships, the overlord of the sky sinking one by one were burned into their retina. The invincible Levitate Ships that won all its battle since the war broke out had finally been woken from its wonderful dream. In the face of disaster, they finally realized — They were just a type of weapon, and will be destroyed by another weapon one day.

Feeling as though they were in a nightmare, the Black Skull Knights hesitated on what they should do.

Realistically speaking, since the Levitate Ships' assault failed, it would be very difficult to take Missillier with brute force, and they will need to pay heavily in blood if they wish to advance. That might be so, but they still had an army despite being forced to such a state by the enemy, it wouldn't be easy to admit defeat so easily.

The moment of hesitation proved to be fatal and decided their fate. Orange lights lighted up everywhere within Missillier City. After disposing of their greatest threat, the Levitate Ships, the remnants of the old Kuscheperca Army had nothing to be worried about and raised the torch of counterattack. The Resvant Vidos got into formation, and advanced slowly but steadily, with the small number of Revantier in the middle of their formation of their infantry unit.

At the very head of this army was an especially prominent group, the strongest Knight Corp of Fremmevira Kingdom led by the Oni faced samurai — the Silver Phoenix Knights. Ikaruga wasn't satisfied with devouring the Levitate Ships, and turned his sights to his next target, the Black Knights.

“The fusée of counterattack is rising, it’s our turn to strike back!”

The demon god Ikaruga swings its Sword Cannon in place of a commander’s baton. With this as their cue, the remnants of the old Kuscheperca army began their attack as one.

Chapter 37: The Nightmare of Missillier

In the far east, behind the vague visage of Mount Aubigne, a brilliant light was shining.

With their backs to the radiant sun rise, the remnants of the old Kuscheperca Army poured out from Missillier City. The Levitate Ships that ruled the skies with ease were gone. Those giant black ships that symbolized the victory of the Žaloudek army were reduced to scraps under the power of the Magius Harpoon and the ravages of the demon god. Nothing can stand in the way of the old Kuscheperca remnant army now. They marched with their spirits burning bright, as if they were venting the melancholy of having their nation destroyed and being forced into a corner.

In contrast to their high spirit, their pace remained slow. Although they had committed the newest model of machine, the Revantier into the fray, the bulk of their units were still the Tower Knights. Their speed was even slower than the Black Knights.

At this moment, the Black Skull Knights who were standing stiffly in place snapped back to their senses because of the echoes of the enemy's advancing footsteps.

“Y-Your Highness... The enemy is coming! Your orders please!”

Everyone on the bridge of the flagship at the very rear of the Žaloudek army cast their gaze to Cristóbal. The destruction of the Steel Wing Knights completely overturned their strategy; should they retreat or engage? Only their commander could decide their path.

A drop of sweat rolled down his forehead. Since their plans had

been foiled, they should retreat for now and reorganize his army. But Cristóbal couldn't issue that order.

After committing the strongest forces of the Žaloudek army, the Black Skull Knights, and the unprecedented aerial battle unit, the Steel Wing Knights, how could he answer to his elder sister who was staying behind in the old capital? On top of that, the Black Skull Knights had no losses yet, which complicated matters. We can still fight— this fact twisted his thinking.

“...Black Knights unit, adopt wall formation. The enemy is upon us, we will be striking back! Valiant knights of Žaloudek, fear not. The enemy are just motley mobs of a defeated army, no one can defeat the Black Knights in an open battlefield. Unleash your power to your heart's content, and show them the might of the Black Skull Knights!!”

After considering briefly, he gave his command. The Žaloudek army obeyed the orders issued from the flagships, and prepared to engage the enemy with mediocre fighting spirits. Their forces didn't head into the forest surrounding Missillier but waited in formation on the plains. The bulky Knights of black steel formed ranks with their pike raised, appearing undaunted and dignified. Very quickly, the soldiers waved away the doubts in their heart, their trust in the brilliance of the black steel superseded the unease in their hearts.

There was no warcry or rustling of their armour as an unnatural silence fell on them. The Black Knights trained the tips of their pikes towards the forest intently and kept still. They held their position with every second, and finally, metallic reflection could be seen from the darkness of the forest. It was the main bulk of the Kuscheperca machines, shaped like towers and equipped with Wall Capes — Resvant Vidos.

When both parties enter into visual range, a shootout started without a word. The serenity of the woods was replaced by the noise of battle.

“Front rank, bear shields and advance! Lock them in the forest!!”

The Tyrants in tight formation at the very head of the group took large strides forward. With pikes and heavy shields in hand, their armour was exceptionally thick even amongst the Black Knights. They blocked the spell projectiles raining down on them from the forest, and pushed forth with brute force.

The tactic of the Žaloudek army was to deploy in the plains where they could move easily, and trap the enemy where it was hard to maneuver. Hence, they equipped the Tyrants which already had outstanding defences with shields, and closed the distance by relying on brute strength. This strategy was meant to defend against the Tower Knights who possessed powerful long range attacks.

The storm of bullets shredded the woods. In the face of the endless tides of flames, the Tyrant advanced without stopping. Not only were their machines tough, it was also obvious how disciplined the Black Skull Knights were, from their refusal to back down in the face of the hail of attacks.

Despite suffering damage from the continuous stream of intensive fire, the Black Knights were close to entering pike attack range. The Tower Knights had zero melee combat capability, and victory would be theirs if they got close enough.

“We caught you, Kuscheperca strawman! Massacre them, charge, charge!! Glory to the Žaloudek Kingdom!!”

Deflecting the projectiles with their black steel armour, they charged ferociously into the enemy formation. The heavy pikes were changed into force of destruction directed at the Tower Knights. The clash of the two armies sounded like a distant roar of thunder and their collision shook the very earth.

On the other hand, inside Missillier City.

Inside the mansion at the city center, Princess Eleonora clasped her hands tightly in devout prayer. She might be praying to god or maybe to her late father.

She felt as if a blade was held to her throat, which kept her up all night. For her, this night was longer than that fateful night in the old capital Delvincourt. Not just her, but knights or non-combatants, all of them waited for the break of dawn with a heart of prayer.

This was a desperate gamble for the remnants army of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom. Even though this was for the sake of war, their heart — the royals were exposed to direct danger. If they lose, they will be done for this time.

This desperate battle was all for the sake of congregating the Levitate Ships in one place. Levitate Ships could soar freely in the sky, appear anywhere and possessed powerful combat abilities. Eliminating the Levitate Ships that wrought all sorts of hardship on the Kuscheperca kingdom since the war begun was the top priority, and at the same time, the greatest obstacle.

To have a decisive battle with the Levitate Ships, they used a certain tactic. It wasn't anything special, they just scattered some baits. The Copper Fang Knights' raid meant the Žaloudek army knew about Missillier which they were using as a base. With the uprisings in the east, the Žaloudek army would definitely target the escaped royals in order to subdue them quickly. And as expected, Žaloudek sent a large punitive army to the east, which included the Steel Wing Knights who possessed Levitate Ships.

The rest was simple. By staying in Missillier even after their

position was exposed, the Žaloudek army would naturally gathered their forces in one place. For the sake of victory, they had to get most of the enemy to muster at one place. This plan was on the verge of insanity, and they would be crushed by overwhelming forces if they made one false move, an incredibly risky gamble.

The Kuscheperca army won the bet tonight. The devastating harpoons of destruction crafted by the Silver Phoenix Knights attacked the Žaloudek army, and just as they planned, fended off the Levitate Ships and pulled the battlefield back down to earth.

Before them was the main forces of the Žaloudek army basking in the peaceful sun — the Black Skull Knights. Compared to the aerial battle which was aided by the powerful weapons of the Silver Phoenix Knights and their members, the battle on the ground was a clash royale, no one could predict the outcome.

“I heard that the vanguards had engaged the enemy.”

“... I see...”

Martina came to the side of the praying Eleonora, and updated her on the situation.

Eleonora relaxed her trembling fingers, and raised her pale face. Even though this was a war against invaders, ordering the soldiers to take the field was still her duty as the Princess. She just needed to give the word, but it was still a heavy burden for a young girl of 16.

She didn't have the ability to command troops on the battlefield. The only thing she could do was to suppress the pain in her heart and pray for victory.

“Ellie, this isn't good for your health. Emrys will work hard on the

war, it will be better for you to rest.”

Her abnormal demeanour worried Martina, who counseled her softly. The young Princess looked so tired that she might snap in two at any moment. She wasn't doing so well yet, and it would be a huge problem if the Princess forced herself and fell ill. However, Eleonora just shook her head slowly and replied:

“The soldiers are risking their lives in their battle with the invaders. No matter how helpless I am as a Princess, how can I just slumber in comfort? And my knight is there too...”

The firm determination of the Princess made Martina open her eyes wide in surprise. The bird that was too afraid to come out of her cage just days ago was spreading her wings and soaring. However, she wondered where she got her unexpectedly stubborn personality from.

Martina felt a glimmer of hope from the country shrouded in dark clouds. With a heart of prayer, her thoughts were with her countrymen in the forest on the outskirts of Missillier.

In response to the Black Knights charging in for melee combat, the remnants of the old Kuscheperca took drastic measures.

The row of Tower Knights that formed a wall similar to the Žaloudek army split, forming numerous gaps. Appearing from the space between them were the knights standing behind them, who then challenged the approaching Black Knights. They were the infantry unit of the newest machine models, the Revantier.

A golden light barged into the middle of the battlefield—

“Hahaha! I won't let you go near the city!”

The Gordesleo piloted by Emrys charged a Tyrant. As both machines had high power output, their collision sent a gust of wind flying outwards.

“You lot! Are you trying to compete against a Tyrant in strength!?”

Not just Gordesleo, the Revantiers around them also took on the Tyrants in melee combat. The Tower Knights which formed the bulk of the Kuscheperca forces were not proficient in close quarters combat, but the Tyrants who forcefully closed the distance were stumped by the appearance of the Revantiers.

Placing the Tower knights that were clearly flawed at the front to entice the enemy — the Žaloudek army fell for the scheme of the Kuscheperca army again.

As the pikes of the Žaloudek turned blunt and they lost their charging momentum, the Vido unit slowly adjusted their position, shifting from a head to head formation to a loose encirclement. The Revantiers led by Gordesleo could take the Tyrants head on, but their numbers were limited. Their task was to keep the enemy in check during this crucial moment. The Resvant Vidos’ multiple Silhouette Arms gleamed with the glow of mana menacingly, they were the true offensive prowess of the Kuscheperca.

A storm of projectile smashed into the Žaloudek army. They couldn’t get near as their spears were blocked by the Revantiers, catching the Žaloudek army in a dilemma inside the forest. During this time, the Black Knights exposed to the magical bullets fell one after another.

“Ugh, we are taking too many losses...! Retreat for now to regroup!!”

The Company commander at the front lines roared angrily. The tide of the battle was obviously going badly for them, and they needed to reorganize. The Žaloudek army gave up on their assault, and switched to retreating while focusing on defence. They managed to stall the Kuscheperca army that wanted to push their advantage as they backed away from the forest.

But what awaited them in the plains was a hellish scene.

Going back slightly in time.

Moments before the two army collided in the forest, the Black Skull Knights in the middle of the formation prepared for battle. The Black Skull Knights at the first ranks might be elites, but as the battle turned intense, it would take a heavy toll on them. It won't be long before the ranks switches, with the middle rank taking their place.

The middle ranks advanced slowly and cautiously in high spirits — At this very moment, numerous shadows appeared from the sky.

They looked up warily, and saw Missile Javelins launched from beyond the forest drawing an arc in the sky as they flew towards them. Its heavy weight and speed allowed it to pierce the tough armour of the Black Knights easily, pinning the machine onto the ground. With each sharp metallic groan, a Black Knight was secured to the ground like some strange objet d'art.

“How is this possible! The Javelins reaching this position isn't possible! Ugh, raise your shields high, the next wave is coming!”

The surviving Black Knights fell into panic. They would never let their guard down on the battlefield, but they never expected deadly attacks to rain down on them so far from the frontlines. The fact

was, normal Javelins couldn't fly over the forest, but the Silver Phoenix Knights' Magius Javelins launched by the Vertical Launched Javelin Thrower made the impossible possible.

After recognizing the danger, the Black Knights lifted their shields over their heads, as expected of veteran warriors of hundreds of battles. However, an alien machine with a red trail blazing behind it flew through the sky as if it was mocking their wariness.

“Found~~ you! There are! So~~ many~~!!”

It was Ikaruga. It followed the Magius Javelins as it crossed the air above the forest, and used its inertia to charge into the midst of the Black Skull Knights. The incredible thing was — the shields raised by the Black Knights became the perfect landing spot for Ikaruga. The Black Knight who took the impact equivalent to a falling comet collapsed from the force, its Strand Crystal Tissue snapping and its joints shattering. Trapped between its shield and the ground, it was crushed in an instant.

“There are too many obstacles in the forest which makes it hard to maneuver in, so I came here to intrude on you!”

The perfect landing spot allowed Ikaruga to disperse the impact of his landing. It then raised its Sword Cannon in a natural movement, and shot a dazzling magic projectile after it changed into Silhouette Arms mode.

Only the vast mana supply of Ikaruga could manifest such a powerful shot, dragging the Black Skull Knights into a torrent of flames. The Black Skull Knights in neat formation then fell into a state that was worse than confusion.

“Don't back down! Let the fool who barged into our encirclement understand his own limits!!”

They had yet to grasp the situation, but their fighting spirit still spurred them to counterattack decisively. Deploying their back weapons, they shot out a powerful barrage of shots. The lone demon god that charged into the center of the unit alone was as good as surrounded, and normally, it would need to pay for its idiocy.

“Nice reactions... In that case, I will answer with the full power of Ikaruga!!”

However, before the shots landed, Eru inputted commands into his keyboard. The flames from the Magius Jet Thrusters shot downwards like a cloak around Ikaruga, sending it into the sky again. After deftly escaping the encirclement of the enemy, Eru acted as if it was his turn to attack and activated Ikaruga’s long range tracking weapon, Rahu Fists. The palm of the four arms on its back broke off, and flew out with a fiery tail behind it. The Tyrants’ were fatally slow to react to the enemy’s extraordinary agility and attack prowess. The Rahu Fists accelerated fiercely and pierced into the Tyrant’s armour as if it was nothing. Ikaruga’s vast mana supply strengthened the Rahu Fists further, bestowing it with a toughness that rivals the Tyrant’s armour.

“Ugh, a bizarre attack! You think you can defeat the Black Knights with just that...!?”

The power of the Rahu Fist that could pierce the armour of the Black Knights was not to be taken lightly, but the Tyrants weren’t so weak that they would fall with one hit. With the Rahu Fists still embedded in their armour, the Black Knights trained their back weapons at the airborne enemy, intending to take it down.

“Now, Ikaruga. Show them your might! The true function of the long range weapon Rahu Fist... Explosion!!”

Eru sent a magic spell to the Rahu Fists via direct control, with a combination of Air Compression and Flame magic scripted into it. The next instant, the fire exploded from inside the Tyrants hit by the Rahu Fists. Using the same mechanism as the Magius Jet Thrusters, an explosion was triggered inside those machines. The Tyrants might be proud of their heavy armour, but there was nothing they could do if they were burned from the inside. The four Black Knights were reduced to scraps in an instant, and spew out flames and spare parts.

“Hie, Hiiiiieee... !?”

The pilot that was hit by an arm that flew behind wailed, his mind refusing to accept this situation. For the Žaloudek pilots who had absolute faith in the armour of the Black Knights, the sight of their machine being blown to bits was enough to crumble their psychological support.

While their mind was still shrouded in fear, they descended into further panic by the deafening roar of the demon god. The main Reactor ‘Behemoth’s Heart’ howled at its loudest volume, and Ikaruga which was engulfed in the flames of its Jet Thrusters landed once again. The strange large swords in both its arms severed the arms of the Tyrants in one swing, while its murderous hands danced in the air in search of its next prey.

“What’s the matter? There are still so many many many many of you, come at me bro! Let us keep on fighting in our Silhouette Knight!”

For Eru, the battlefield where his beloved machine could unleash its full potential was a paradise. He piloted Ikaruga excitedly, charging deliberately in the direction where there were more enemies. The Sword Cannons slashed at the shocked Tyrants, Projectiles burst into flames and the Rahu Fist punched through the chaos, reducing one Tyrant after another into scrap.

The greatest misfortune of the Black Skull Knights was how poorly their Black Knights matched against Ikaruga. The Black Knights retaliated with all their might, but Ikaruga dodged them easily with the mobility of its Magius Jet Thrusters. On the other hand, they couldn't evade the unnaturally swift attacks of Ikaruga. No matter how much pride they had in their strength, it would be meaningless if they couldn't hit, but their heavy armour couldn't block Ikaruga's ridiculously strong firepower.

Even if they want to surround it with numbers, the demon god could move on the ground nimbly, and even take to the sky. Its agility was beyond their imagination, not an enemy the Black Knights could handle.

"M-Monster! You fucking monster——!!"

In the end, they could only watch helplessly before the rampaging demon god.

The Black Skull Knights who were being massacred one sidedly saw a greater threat that appeared mercilessly before them. A large group of cavalry charged out of the forest with a head full of steam, it was the 3rd Company's Tzendrinble with their wagons in tow. After finishing their long range Missile Javelins attacks, they switched to an assault loadout immediately and charged here. On the wagon were the 1st and 2nd Company that were shooting magic projectiles.

"The Knight Commander is wrecking havoc. The enemy's formation and focus is in disarray. Let's grind away at them from the outside, let's go!!"

The Tzendrinble piloted by the 3rd Company Captain Helvi neighed loudly, and with this as the signal, the cavalry charged as one.

Lances thrust by the Tzendrinbles pierced the Black Knights in their path, and the Kardartolle on the wagons shot in all directions. The demon guy rampaged in the middle, while the cavalry cut down the Black Knights from the outside.

“What is... What is with these people! Impossible, the elites of the Black Knights fell so easily...! Ahhh, monster... That damn Death God!”

Like a sand castle hit by a huge wave, the Black Skull Knights were decimated in no time. No way to fortify their defences, no means of attack and finally, nowhere to run. The Žaloudek army’s middle rank was routed. Sounds of explosion and metal being crush filled the battlefield, and they faced annihilation.

— Could this be called a tragedy? What the vanguard of the Žaloudek army saw on their retreat was this hellish scene.

They were supposed to link up with the middle rank that was conserving its energy, but the sights before them were too devastating. Fires burning brightly and the wreckage of the Black Knights filled their field of vision. Just what happened, how were the Black Knights destroyed so thoroughly? All this was beyond their imagination.

“How could this be... What happened to the middle rank!? Just what did they face!?”

The remnants of the old Kuscheperca army were still closing in on them from behind, so they had to retreat from the woods and step into the plains of destruction. After taking a step forward, they immediately discovered a being that was moving in the devastated battlefield. They thought it was an ally who survived for a moment, but ditched that thought quickly.

Noticing the group emerging from the forest, ‘that thing’ turned its head. How could that thing be an ally? Their army would never have a Silhouette Knight with six arms and a human face twisted in fury.

Dust rose from behind that thing. Centaur Knights trampled over the remains of the Black Knights scattered all over the place, pulling a giant wagon behind it. Putting two and two together, they realized the ones that caused this carnage were none other than this demon god and the alien cavalry behind it.

“Demon faced, Death God...!”

The remnants army of the old Kuscheperca Kingdom was still marching closer from behind. The vanguard shouldn’t have fought long with the enemy, so how did they wrought such carnage in such a short time? No one present could fathom this.

Shortly after that, the main forces of the old Kuscheperca remnant army finally caught up with the Žaloudek army that couldn’t move after witnessing this terrifying scene, and launched their attack. There was no time to hesitate— despite the apparent danger before them, their only way to survive was to head into the barren plains.

With solemn determination, the vanguard of the Black Skull Knights challenged the Silver Phoenix Knights valiantly, and was wiped out in short order.

The elites of the Žaloudek army, the Black Skull Knights were decimated.

From beginning to the end, Cristóbal could only watch the entire process in a daze. He couldn’t be blamed, as everyone in the bridge of the flagship were in the same state. No one could keep up with

the development of the battle.

The situation was already beyond salvation, and Cristóbal realized that there was no way to win this battle. He couldn't find any chance to obtain victory.

Right now, the only ones still alive were the flagship and a handful of the forces in the rearguard, the fact that the command structure still being intact was a miracle. In the face of such utter destruction, it wouldn't be strange if the army falls apart and desert. Their only options was to accept complete annihilation, or try to let some of them escape before the end.

“Those are... the Centaur Knights Doroteo mentioned, and the demon god!! Impossible. How could such a thing exist...!?”

At this moment, Cristóbal remembered— the alien Silhouette Knight that snatched the Kuscheperca royals from Fontaine, and single handedly destroyed the Levitate Ship commanded by Doroteo. Cristóbal thought he believed the testimony Doroteo betted his life on, but he actually still held reservations in his heart. If he accepted Doroteo's words and took precautions, he would've adopted a different tactic for this war. His heart was filled with regrets.

“Notify the army to retreat... Retreat! Before those monsters catches us... Hurry!!”

His mouth turned dry without him realizing it. Just how many soldiers still have their wits about them to act on this command that came too late? Even so, they still took action frantically.

The Blow Engine activated, and the flagship started to turn around. The few scant surviving Black Knights also chased after the retreating ship to leave the battlefield, they had to get away from

this place of despair before that rampaging monster notice them. They no longer had the pride of the Žaloudek army elites, and terror pushed their feet to flee.

Unfortunately, their hopes were for naught as the sound of hooves behind them grew closer. The ground units comprised of the slow Black Knights could never escape the Tzendrinble.

The 3rd Company began their pursuit, and caught the Black Knights that were trailing behind.

“Your Highness, p-please look! The ground units are under attack, if this goes on, even if they are the Black Knights...!!”

“So what!? You want me to save them? With our numbers, we will just die together. Forget about them, tell the Figurehead to increase power to the Blow Engine, leave this place as fast as we can!!”

As the flagship in the sky peered down at the chaotic battle on the ground, the Blow Engine was turned to its highest setting. Airdropping the Silhouette Knights on the Levitate Ship to reinforce them would just be an act of futility, so their judgement was adequate. However, whether they could escape the enemy’s attack was a different matter.

“There’s another vessel! It’s escaping!!”

“It’s great that you came! How can I let you leave so easily!?”

Two Tzendrinbles splitted off from the 3rd Company, it was the machines piloted by Chid and Ady. Unlike the machines from 3rd Company outfitted with assault gear, they still had the Vertical Launched Javelin Thrower attached to them. The instant they discovered the fleeing flagship, they shot out all of their Missile Javelins.

The ships shook violently, and Cristóbal understood that the enemy had closed their jaws on them.

“Ugghhh!?! Damn it, damage, damage report! We are still airborne!! Don’t slow down. We have to get to Fontaine no matter what...!!”

He ordered in a panic, but was dumbstruck when he saw the scene outside the bridge window.

Something was charging towards the Levitate Ship from below, engulfed in flames and roaring loudly. A demon god of destruction not from this world caught the Levitate Ship by using the overwhelming speed of the Magius Jet Thrusters, and landed on the ship.

“How can this be, it can fly to such heights!? What is this monster...”

Cristóbal got up and left the captain’s seat, glaring at the demon god. At this moment, the demon god turned its head and locked eyes with him, sending deep terror down his spine. What madness was this? The demon god wore a mask of an extremely furious man. Not just its prowess, even its appearance was beyond the common sense of Silhouette Knights.

“D-Damn it... You monster! I don’t fear you!!”

The fire in his heart overwhelmed his terror, it was rage. Ironically — Cristóbal came to his senses because of the rage in his heart. He leapt up from his seat immediately, and ran for the Levitate Ship’s hangar.

“Looks like it is time to put an end to this.”

Eru manipulated the demon god Ikaruga in a relaxed manner. As he was ready to take his first step on the flagship, a section at the top of the ship opened. He watched intrigued as a Silhouette Knight appeared from the hole through an elevator device.

“You monster! Who permitted you to stand on this vessel? How dare you be so insolent towards the Second Prince of the Žaloudek Kingdom!?”

With white armour decorated with gold trimmings and a shimmering emblem, this elegant machine was obviously on a different level from mass produced machines. This was the Commander machine of the Žaloudek Kingdom that destroyed the King’s mount ‘Kartoga Ol Cauchard’ of Kuscheperca Kingdom, Alkelorix’.

Cristóbal inside its cockpit glared at the demon god with bloodshot eyes. The expensive personal machines of the royals, Alkelorix, had the best performance within the entire Žaloudek army, and Cristóbal was confident of his own capabilities. Despite that, his chances were grim, and the only thing that kept him going was his pride in not going down without a fight.

“Look at what you have done, you destroyed my army! And even dare lay your hands on my ship? This is unforgivable. You should feel honoured that I am executing you personally!”

Cristóbal encouraged himself, and let Alkelorix drew its sword. Eru who was in the cockpit of the demon god smiled—

“I see, since there is a royalty here, that means this is a flagship huh. Your machine’s back weapon and combat equipment seemed to be a standard equipment. It looks majestic and full of confidence... I am looking forward to this.”

The air intake valves of the Magius Jet Thrusters roared and the demon god raised its Sword Cannon, taking one step forward. Just this was enough to terrify Cristóbal and make him feel as if his heart had been gripped. He pushed himself on, and charged with Alkelorix. The top of the Levitate Ship was narrow, so they were in sword range right from the start, and there was no meaning in schemes or conserving one's power.

With the smooth movement of a machine of the highest grade, it slashed ferociously as it deployed its back weapon, firing intensely at the demon god. If the enemy was a normal Silhouette Knight, the overwhelming attacks would have ended the battle — unfortunately, this didn't apply to the demon god. Supported by its vast mana output, the demon god swung its heavy Sword Cannon deftly, deflecting the projectiles easily, and even broke Alkelorix's sword.

"T-That easily... is my attack just child's play to you!?"

Cristóbal groaned as his machine stumbled backwards, and he drew his backup blade while trembling. His all out attack was parried easily, would his life be forfeit when the demon god switches from defence to offence? His instinct as a warrior warned him of the danger, but he didn't have the chips on hand to overturn this situation.

"... Wait, pilot of the demon god! You should be from the land of the demon beast guardians, Fremmevira right? Why? Why are you helping Kuscheperca! Because of the kinship between the royal families!? Or are the demon beast guardians eyeing this land!?"

With no alternatives, he had to talk his way out of this in place of his weapons. He wasn't as good with words as his brother or sister, but he couldn't ask for much under such circumstances

"No, the one who took the field for kinship is the Young Master. I

am just wielding my sword as part of my obligation as a knight, and enjoy the battles(festival) with Silhouette Knights.”

The cute voice didn't match the appearance of the demon god knight with a ferocious mask at all, confusing Cristóbal. At the same time, he found a glimmer of hope in that answer.

“Ha, haha! So your actions had nothing to do with your beliefs and your nation. Then come to my side with your monstrous Silhouette Knight! It would too much of a waste for you to be just a knight, if you follow me, I will bestow you with whatever position you want! Also, the goal of Žaloudek is to restore the ancient grand nation of Father Aburdene, and we will seize the entire Western League of Nations one day. In that case, the battlefield you yearn for is set for you! How about it!?”

For someone as arrogant as him, this was the most sincere persuasion he could offer.

“Hmm, I might not look like it, but I have been given a very high position in my Kingdom. Can you offer me anything comparable to that?”

He thought he would be rejected unhesitatingly, but the better than expected reply made Cristóbal continued:

“Fufu, you don't need to worry about that. I am the Second Prince, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Žaloudek Kingdom! Our national power is not something that a backwater demon beast guard country can compare with, and I can easily give you a status two times better than before...! How about it? If you want to, I will prepare a peerage for you!”

Alkelorix opened its arms wide as if to welcome Ikaruga, and the smile on Cristóbal's face deepened.

He was treating the demon god's words as haggling the price. In other words, the demon god had taken the bait. Offering better benefits was a natural choice in negotiations.

Convinced that he had persuaded the demon god the conditions he offered was undeniably enticing. The technology of a single Silhouette Knights that could turn the tide of war and its pilot— if he could obtain these, offering peerage was nothing at all. After all, with the vast land under their feet known as Kuscheperca Kingdom, Cristóbal could give him as much as it as he wish.

The composure and arrogance that Cristóbal regained was shattered by Eru's next words—

“Ohh, well then... The full authority over the development and production of the Silhouette Knights of your country, as well as full control over their distribution and the command of all your Knight Corps, will be handed over to me?”

When he heard that, Cristóbal doubted his ears and turned silent. Confusion then rose and finally, rage erupted, making him shake his fist and shout:

“What... manner of joke is this!? A mere knight... No, it is the same even if you are a noble! Aside from the King, no one would have such authority!”

“I am not joking. In fact, I have such authority in my nation. The Knights I brought here just happen to be the forces I can mobilize immediately.”

Eru smiled deviously as he said that, and the demon god started counting its fingers along with his words:

“First, I have the authority to act in the name of His Majesty for the national development of Silhouette Knight, the development itself is led by me anyway; I have authority over the details of supply, it is just too much hassle so I didn’t bother with that; As for the priority in deployment of the Knight Corps, I have command authority over all Knight Corps in the event of a disaster level demon beast attack. Depending on the circumstances, my orders might even supercede that of the King. I don’t want to manage territory at all, so I don’t need the Peerage!”

Cristóbal was lucky that he was seated inside Alkelorix. Why? Because he was showing an undignified dumb face.

What the demon god said was beyond his comprehension. Which Kingdom in the world would grant such powers to a knight that didn’t even have a peerage? If he agree to such terms, it will only be possible by granting Eru a position similar to a royal like Cristóbal, so there was no way he would agree. It was only natural for Cristóbal to think this way since he didn’t know about Eru’s glorious exploits, and how he was seen as the last line of defence in a national crisis. This robot nerd had the passion to change an entire Kingdom, which was beyond his imagination.

His entire body started to shiver. Seeing the enemy turned silent, Eru folded his arms as if he had expected this, and felt he had been too mean.

“If you don’t want to die, how about this? If you dismount from that Silhouette Knight, I won’t attack. And of course, I will take your machine.”

This was the biggest kindness Eru could offer. For the pure robot enthusiast, there wasn’t any concept of showing mercy to an enemy Silhouette Knight. But conversely, if someone dismount from their Silhouette Knight, they would no longer be a target, and it didn’t matter what happens to them.

“... Why you... Just how much do you look down on me!? Before our might, anyone who oppose us are fools!! You madman, do you think I will put myself at your mercy!?”

However, Cristóbal's mental state was at the brink of breaking down. Eru's twisted kindness could no longer reach him, and all he could hear was an ultimatum.

With no regards with the difference in ability and cramped footholds, and launched his attacks powered by his rage. Alkelorix swung its backup blade, and charged forth with a barrage of magic projectiles. Ikaruga didn't just defend this time. It dodged the projectiles with its Magius Jet Thrusters, then used its explosive speed to swing its Sword Cannon, shattering Alkelorix's sword along with its right hand.

The powerful impact made Alkelorix lose its balance, and it staggered back in a weird dance. At this moment, Rahu Fists flew in from a blind spot stabbed into the legs of Alkelorix. Hellish explosion burst out, blowing the legs into pieces. Alkelorix almost fell off the flagship after losing an arm and both legs, and was stepped on by Ikaruga at the last moment before slipping off.

“It's no good, I am bad at showing mercy to Silhouette Knights (robots). This is your last chance. Are you going to dismount and hand the machine over to me?”

Inside the cockpit of the tumbling Alkelorix, Cristóbal shook his heavy head. As his conscious cleared, he understood completely that he had been defeated.

In an instant, blood rushed into his brain and he pulled his control stick rashly. Alkelorix only intact left arm swiped hard at Ikaruga's leg. The attack that could break its own fist made Ikaruga withdraw its leg. Without any support, Alkelorix rolled off the Levitate Ship and into the air.

“Hahahaha, hahaha...! You monster! I won’t let you have your way! I didn’t lose to you, I chose a noble death by my own will...!!”

Before he finished, Alkelorix reached the ground. The impact kicked up a dust cloud, splintering its body. Even a Silhouette Knight with hardening script couldn’t take the impact from falling from such a height. Eru watched the Second Prince of Žaloudek who chose to go down with his flagship, and said with respect:

“To die with your machine, that’s great resolve. Including the ship sailing in the air, I had a great time playing with your weapons, what a nice ‘battlefield’. It isn’t much, let me pray that you will have a wonderful next life.”

He offered his well wishes for his enemy rather sincerely, and immediately took the next course of action. Ikaruga turned and pointed his Sword Cannon at the bridge of the flagship. The murderous Silhouette Arms did not hide its lethal killing intent, locking on to the crew.

“Alright, the people controlling this ship should be able to hear me right? Land the ship immediately, and yield control over to me. As you can see, resistance is futile.”

The crew who could only watch idly as the event unfolded before them shivered as if they were struck by lightning, and surrendered. The flagship landed slowly, marking the conclusion of the battle at Missillier.

“... I don’t understand. What are you saying?”

The First Princess Catalina who was standing besides the throne stared at the Black Skull Knights soldier who kowtowing his head

onto the ground, and asked in an emotionless tone.

“Y-Your Highness!! The result of attacking Missillier... The Black Skull Knights lost 90% of their Black Knights. 10 out of the 24 Levitate Ships of the Steel Wing Knights were... sunk! None of the ships returned unscathed!”

Several days had passed since the battle, and the remnants of the Black Skull Knights returned to the Žaloudek army central governance house. The reports by the surviving soldier were beyond shocking, and stabbed deep into Catalina’s chest.

This was only natural. After all, the Žaloudek Kingdom committed their main forces, the Black Skull Knights, including 100 of their elite machines, but ended in an unprecedented disastrous defeat. Less than one company of Black Knights made it back to Delvincourt. However, what shocked Catalina the most was the soldier’s next words—

“Also, Prince Cristóbal who was commanding from the flagship... duelled with the enemy who boarded the Levitate Ship... and fell from the sky, killed in action!!”

Catalina showed a dazed expression for quite some time, a face she usually won’t show to anyone. She slowly grasped the situation, and felt a chill from the ends of her limbs.

The Black Skull Knights were annihilated, and her brother was dead. Was he too careless and underestimated the enemy? The excellent results from earlier battles did make them arrogant, but the losses this time is still too heavy. It was impossible for an army to move with the aim of self destruction? With the Steel Wing Knights and multiple Levitate Ships committed, she couldn’t think of any reason why they would lose.

Admst the confusion, she realized— Since Cristóbal was dead, she was now the Commander-in –Chief of the Žaloudek army, and could show no further signs of wavering before her subordinates.

“... I understand. Leave me...!”

She couldn't conceal the trembling in her voice. She squeezed out these words with the last of her rationality. She needed some time to compose herself.

After the Black Skull Knights soldiers left in a great hurry, Catalina immediately dismissed everyone in the audience hall. Her emotions were on the verge of exploding, and to hide her unsightly appearance from others, she chased them all away.

Sobbings came from the lonely audience hall. All the education she received as a royal couldn't stop her from losing her emotions, her sibling bond with Cristóbal made her weep in sadness.

She didn't remain sad for too long. After shedding tears of sorrow, what she felt was fury. The rage of her kin being taken away made her choose her next course of action—

“I won't forgive.. The enemy that killed Crist. But even if I want to avenge him, the defeat this time is too unsightly. After losing the Black Skull Knights, we lack the combat capability.”

Once she regained her calm, she agonized with how serious the situation was.

The Black Skull Knights suffered serious losses, but it was the sinking of the Levitate Ship that was the bigger problem. Levitate Ships were an invincible existence so far, and the main reason that the Žaloudek army remained undefeated. But now, 10 of them were lost in one battle. The influence of this was more dire than the

destruction of the Black Knights. However, she couldn't tell immediately how bad it would be.

"We need to increase the number of Black Knights... No. To get back at them, Levitate Ships are necessary. But with so many Levitate Ships destroyed, this meant that maintaining the status quo was dangerous too. We need to strengthen the Levitate Ships fast... To think that even the Steel Wing Knights got decimated, Lord Collazo must be surprised too."

"That's right. It was really shocking for me, Your Highness."

A reply coming from the audience hall even though she was suppose to be alone made Catalina turned her head sharply like a spring— An unassuming man was standing there. He was the Director of the development workshop in Zaloudek Kingdom, who was also the inventor of the Levitate Ship, Horacio Collazo.

"... I sent everyone away, Lord Collazo. You might be an important man, but do you think anything you do would be forgiven?"

The situation was strange. Before the fierce Catalina who was twisting her beautiful face, Horacio acted as it wasn't any of his business, and said frankly:

"Yes, I understand that of course. But with the danger we are facing, I need something to be approved by Your Highness no matter what, that's why I came."

Catalina hesitated for a moment, then sat onto the throne. She understood that now wasn't the time to mind such trivial matters, and she needed to prioritize taking actions.

"Alright, I won't pursue the matter this time. I never imagined the Levitate Ships of the Steel Wing Knights would be sunk, we have to

strengthen the remaining ships quickly. Kuscheperca won't let this chance slip by, there is no time to hesitate."

"That's exactly why I am here... just how did the enemy who caused such ridiculous damage fought? For the sake of the future, I would like to listen to the details. Your Highness, please allow me to interview the survivors..."

It wasn't clear how Horacio thought of the current situation as a twisted smile appeared on his unassuming face. Catalina hesitated momentarily before making a swift decision:

"... Do as you please. But failure is unacceptable, we can't let anymore Levitate Ships sink. Since you proposed this, show me the proper results."

"Of course, I wish for the Levitate Ships to be the masters of the skies too."

After a superficial bow, Horacio left. Catalina sighed deeply and collapsed onto the throne. She didn't know what he was thinking, but they had a common consensus on the Levitate Ships. She could only pray that he could increase their combat capability significantly.

She raised her head and immediately summoned a messenger, telling him:

"Bring me Doroteo Mardones right now."

At this moment, a determination she had never shown before appeared on her face.

Since the intense battle between the remnants of the old Kuscheperca army and the Žaloudek army in the outskirts of Missillier, the power map in eastern Kuscheperca changed drastically.

The activities of the Silver Phoenix Knights in the region had gradually corroded Žaloudek Kingdom's control over the territory, and the terrible defeat of the Black Skull Knights and Steel Wing Knights finally dissolved their hold on the land.

After the remnant army of the old Kuscheperca army achieved unprecedented victory, they marched for the eastern governance house set up by the Žaloudek army in Fontaine. The loss of the Black Skull Knights and Steel Wing Knights, and the death of the Commander-in-Chief Cristóbal meant that the Žaloudek army couldn't spare the effort to stop their enemy. As the flags of the Kuscheperca were raised in the towns and cities along Pan-Kucher Road, the garrison unit in the governance house retreated without even raising their blade.

The symbol of the Žaloudek Kingdom—their eastern governance house fell just like that, which had widespread effect on the Kuscheperca territories under the Žaloudek Kingdom's rule.

Tzendrinble walked down the main street of Fontaine, and the people in the city were all shocked by the unfamiliar Centaur Knight. But when they saw it hoisting the flag of Kuscheperca, they returned to the streets timidly again.

Behind the Tzendrinble was the infantry unit made up of Revantiers, and the Resvant Vido range attack unit. The citizens couldn't help bursting into cheers when they witness the grand formation of the Kuscheperca army that took back Fontaine.

“What do you think, Princess Eleonora? This is what we won.”

Other than the pilot Chid, Princess Eleonora was also inside the cockpit of Tzendrinble. The Tzendrinble that was originally designed to be a two seater had a much more spacious cockpit than other Silhouette Knights. Aside from the main pilot seat, there was also space for a co-pilot.

“... Yes, we have won.”

Eleonora listened to the cheers that didn't lose out to the revving of the Silhouette Knights. The joy expressed by the citizens, their cheers for the Silhouette Knights and the occasional praise for the Princess. This scene was too embarrassing, making her cover her blushing face.

Shortly after, the formation reached the end of the main street. Before them was the base of the old eastern territories— Lacepede Castle. When she saw the castle she had some history with, she trembled slightly and turned stiff. A firm and strong voice came from behind her and said:

“Don't worry, this is our castle now, we won't let you be locked up. I won't permit that.”

“Yes, it is fine now... I will be counting on you from now on, my knight.”

When he heard Eleonora said that with absolute trust, Chid didn't know where to look. In the end, he kept his composure and had no mishap with his control, reaching the castle smoothly...

“We have finally taken this place back, my love...”

Inside the study room of Lacepede Castle, Martina caressed an old desk. The study remained the same after its owners changed, and didn't look any different from her memory. Lacepede Castle had

finally returned to the hands of its original owner.

“However, because of Žaloudek, I have bad memories of this castle too.”

She smiled bitterly, and shifted her gaze outside the window, where the towers around the castle could be seen. Just a few months ago, there were held prisoners in these towers by the Second Prince of Žaloudek Kingdom, Cristóbal. Not just her, Martina’s daughter Isabella felt conflicted about this too. The moment she entered the castle, she said—

“Mother, let’s demonish those towers.”

Martina considered her opinion rather seriously, and would probably renovate those towers soon.

The Silver Phoenix Knights and Kuscheperca main forces shift their base to Fontaine. They needed to disguise themselves as the Silver Phoenix Merchants or come here in Silhouette Gears in the past, but were free to walk in the streets now. Emrys immediately took a stroll outside to enjoy this new found freedom.

“Sure is nice not having to sneak around! It was really boring the last time I came. The view is much better without the classless Black Knights!”

“The roads from here to Mount Aubigne had all been recaptured, the crowd will return slowly.”

Eru surveyed the scenery in agreement.

The area of influence of the old Kuscheperca army extended from Missillier to Fontaine, and the Pan-Kucher Road had reverted to its

original function. The messenger sent to Fremmevira Kingdom should have reported the result of this war by now. Commerce between the two Kingdoms should resume very soon, and Fontaine will become prosperous as it did in the past.

Several days after the remnants of the old Kuscheperca army retook Fontaine—

Eleonora was in her own room, watching the streets outside the window. Because Fontaine had stabilized, it was regaining its vitality day by day. This was how Kuscheperca Kingdom actually was before the Žaloudek Kingdom attack. She burned this scene into her eyes and renewed her resolve. Moments later, Martina came to her side and said:

“Everyone is here... Ellie, are you ready?”

“Yes... Aunt, I won’t run anymore.”

She still felt unreliable, but the fire of determination was burning deep within her eyes. Martina watched her niece with gentle eyes, she slowly knelt and bowed.

Inside the courtyard of Lacepede Castle, the nobles of the old Kuscheperca remnant army were gathered along with all members of the Silver Phoenix Knights. Their eyes fell on the star of this gathering. Eleonora could feel their feelings of anticipation, and was almost overwhelmed by the atmosphere. Even though she came here with resolve, her inherent soft personality still rear its head every now and again.

Her gaze wavered, and finally found one person amongst the crowd — A slender youth. The pilot of the Centaur Knight, the knight who swore fealty to her and promised her victory nodded once in response. With that encouragement, Eleonora finally took her last step.

Eleonora clasped her hands tightly together, and said after surveying the crowd:

“There is something I want to tell everyone today.”

All the chatter faded away, and everyone waited for Eleonora’s next words with bated breath. She then made her move. Despite a little bit of trembling, her tone was filled with determination that was completely different from the past her, and slowly stated:

“I will... inherit my father’s will, and become the Queen of this nation. I have much to learn, but I believe in the strength of everyone... and in this war. I... Queen Eleonora Miranda Kuscheperca declare that we will rebuild our great fallen country—in the name of the new Kuscheperca Kingdom!!”

C.E. 1281. Winter is coming.

News that the new Kuscheperca Kingdom had been founded, and the coronation of the new Queen spread across the Western League of Nations like wildfire.

Although many countries felt confused about this sudden change, they realized one important fact—

The new monarch had the power to recapture their lost territory, and the Žaloudek Kingdom that was supposed to be more powerful was gradually losing their edge.

The power struggle between the large nations would influence the west greatly. With the declaration as the turning point, the Western Grand Storm enters a new chapter.